



Western Reserve
Land Conservancy

land • people • community

Landline

Spring 2019

WRLANDCONSERVANCY.ORG



WELCOME

Welcome to the latest edition of Landline, Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s periodic newsletter.

You may have noticed that the design has changed. Never fear.

You can still expect to read exciting stories about our work to permanently conserve vibrant natural areas, help build parks and preserves, preserve family farmland, and create healthier urban environments across northern and eastern Ohio.

You can still expect to hear from those tremendous partners—staff and board members, landowners, volunteers, donors, organizations, and municipalities—that collaborate with us to fill our region with thriving, prosperous communities.

You can still expect to learn about engaging opportunities to get out on the land, get your hands dirty, and get involved in this impactful work.

We hope that you enjoy the new Landline layout and that you are as inspired by the stories herein as we are. Together, we’re making our region and our world a better place!

With gratitude,



RICH COCHRAN, President & CEO

PHOTO CREDIT: JULIE HAHN



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MAKE A DATE WITH CONSERVATION



ASHCROFT WOODS EXPANDS

After more than a decade of work, Western Reserve Land Conservancy conserved the 167-acre Plumb Creek Rookery property in Ashtabula County.

The property contains more than a mile of Plumb Creek as well as a vast high-quality wetland complex that is home to a great blue heron rookery with 40 nests. According to Brett Rodstrom, vice president of eastern field operations for the Land Conservancy, more than 250 species

have been identified on the property including black bears, sandhill cranes, and spotted turtles. Notably, this project adds to a 1,050-acre contiguous conservation corridor, including Ashcroft Woods Preserve owned by the Land Conservancy, in the Upper Grand River watershed.

“Clean water starts with the land,” said Rodstrom. “Conserving the wetlands and swamp forests on this property ensures effective water

filtration, which helps support excellent water quality in the State-designated Wild and Scenic Grand River.”

Funding for this project was generously provided by a Clean Ohio Greenspace Conservation Fund grant, a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant (in partnership with US Fish & Wildlife and Ducks Unlimited), and an anonymous private donor.

Conservation land grows in Mahoning County

With a strong conservation ethic, Andy Baltes always knew he wanted to preserve his family farm in Mahoning County.



“There are many ways individuals can permanently preserve their property,” explained Alex Czayka, senior vice president of conservation transactions for Western Reserve Land Conservancy. “Mr. Baltes achieved his conservation dreams by donating conservation easements on two farmland properties to the Land Conservancy.”

Baltes, a third-generation farmer, manages the family grain farm with his son, A.J. Though the farm operated as a dairy for decades, Baltes transitioned to growing grain and cover crops within the past few years. The donated conservation easements prevent future development of the 231-acre and 159-acre tracts of land, while allowing for continued use and management of forested and agricultural lands. In addition to the donation of easements, Baltes created and restored small wetlands on the property to trap sediment and nutrient runoff, one of the many conservation practices employed by Andy and A.J.

“We’ve always been a conservation-minded family,” noted Andy Baltes. “I wanted to ensure that this land would never be developed and the work we’ve done to improve our natural world would continue.”

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The permanent conservation of the 390-acre Baltes Farm more than doubles the amount of land conserved by Western Reserve Land Conservancy in Mahoning County. Czayka noted, “We are excited to expand our work in this part of our region and grateful to work with landowners like Andy and A.J. who are tremendous stewards of the land.”



Tinker’s
Creek
CONSERVATION
CORRIDOR EXPANDS

PHOTO CREDIT: CARUCCI

Western Reserve Land Conservancy recently partnered with the Village of Glenwillow to conserve 35 acres and nearly half a mile of Tinker’s Creek, the largest tributary to the Cuyahoga River.

Importantly, the conservation and creation of Tinker’s Creek Preserve II not only supports the health of the watershed, but also the health of the local community.

Tinker’s Creek Preserve II is a significant addition to nearby established parks like the 2,290-acre Cleveland Metroparks Bedford Reservation as well as three additional properties owned by the Village of Glenwillow that total nearly 60 acres. This includes the 175-acre Tinker’s Creek Preserve I created by the Land Conservancy and the Village in 2014.

According to Mayor Mark Cegelka, the corridor of conservation properties will support potential trail connections and an expanded greenway network that will connect Cleveland Metroparks to the heart of the Village.

“It is a testament to our partners that they could see the future potential of this property for conservation and the Clean Ohio officials’ vision that they supported this project,” said Cegelka. “When constructed, the proposed trail will allow connections to be made from other trails throughout the entire region.”

“The project is a critical element to a world-class trail system in the Village that will ultimately benefit the community for years to come. It has been a pleasure to help facilitate the exemplary vision of Mayor Cegelka and the Village administration,” explained Joe Leslie, vice president of real estate for the Land Conservancy. Completing Tinker’s Creek Preserve II required the Land Conservancy to flex its expertise in complex land acquisition and conservation funding strategies. The Land Conservancy team negotiated with several landowners, secured critical Clean Ohio Conservation Funding on behalf of the Village of Glenwillow, coordinated all legal documents, and more to ensure the conservation of five separate parcels.

Leslie added, “No matter how complex these transactions can be, our goal is simple: conserve land for people in an effort to support healthy and thriving communities.”



FOCUSED ON FAMILY

Located in northwest Holmes County and northeast Knox County, Valley Head Farm encompasses 417 acres in the scenic Mohican region.

There are 140 acres of tillable farmland, which are rented out to soybean, corn and wheat farmers. The majority of the property is forested with a diverse collection of tree species including 30 acres of white pine (enrolled in the Federal Conservation Reserve Program) and 247 acres of deciduous and coniferous tree species. More than 2 miles of tributaries can be found flowing into the Mohican River which comprises the western boundary of the property.

Four generations of the Miller family have owned, explored, worked, and loved the land since 1930.

“The Miller family has done an outstanding job in balancing the need to work the land and earn an income from it, as well as conserve and enjoy its beautiful natural resources at the same time,” said Andy McDowell, vice president of western field operations for the Land Conservancy. He added that in addition to being great stewards of the property, they are gracious hosts.

McDowell first met with the Miller family over cookies and coffee to discuss the conservation easement process after Wilbur (Bud) and Jean Miller read a newspaper article about how their neighbors, the Balderstons, had permanently conserved their nearby farm. They wanted to do the same.

“My mother encouraged all of us that they wanted to pursue a conservation easement,” explained Julia Miller, one of Bud and Jean’s daughters and a member of the family LLC that owns the property. “Time is finite and this property is their life’s work. We knew they wanted to see the land preserved, and so did we.”

After a year of discussion and planning, Valley Head Farm LLC donated a conservation easement to Western Reserve Land Conservancy in 2018 permanently preserving the organization’s first property in Knox County.

For many families, like the Millers, preserving land is about much more than the property. It’s about preserving the precious memories and family legacy associated with their land.

Julia Miller noted the many fond memories she and her sisters made on their parents’ farm. Now, those memories are being passed down to their children and grandchildren, who visit often. Her nephew, Miles Liebtag concurred. He shared,

“I endeavor to spend as much time as possible on the farm and often bring my daughter. She’s forming a link to the farm through her experiences with her great grandparents on the family land.”

McDowell added, “It was a pleasure to work with multiple generations of the Miller family to preserve their farm the way it had been for nearly a century—focused on family.”

Time is finite and this property is their life's work. We knew they wanted to see the land preserved and so did we.



Arbor Day CELEBRATIONS BRANCH OUT

PHOTO CREDIT: ANITA LOUISE PHOTOGRAPHY

As a leading member of the Cleveland Tree Coalition, Western Reserve Land Conservancy continues to lead the effort to grow Cleveland’s leafy tree canopy to get us back to our roots as the Forest City for which we were once known.

“Trees make us healthier, happier and are a critical piece of our community infrastructure,” said Rich Cochran, President and CEO of the Land Conservancy. “We are invested in and proud to collaborate with community partners to ensure a stronger community through more greenspace and a heartier tree canopy.”

“To you, to me, and to trees!”

On Arbor Day Eve, Western Reserve Land Conservancy hosted Toast to Trees, a reception sponsored by Market Garden Brewery to celebrate Arbor Day and the importance of trees. More than 100 guests attended the event and enjoyed the Cleveland Canopy IPA, a tree-themed beer made especially for the Land Conservancy and aptly named through a social media contest.





You scream, I scream we all scream for trees

Five hundred tree seedlings were adopted on Arbor Day by loving plant parents. For the fourth year in a row, the Land Conservancy teamed up with Mitchell’s Ice Cream to distribute the complimentary tree seedlings to customers. Throughout the day, Land Conservancy staff members and volunteers chatted with customers about the benefits of trees and proper planting techniques. Special thanks to Mitchell’s Ice Cream, Bartlett Tree Expert Company, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District and the Northeast Reintegration Center for their support of this event!

Canopy program. Over 100 trees were distributed at no cost to residents!

We sincerely thank the Third Federal Foundation, ArcelorMittal, the Davey Tree Expert Company, and the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District for sponsoring the Arbor Day Block Party. Special thanks to AmeriCorps City Year, Bartlett Tree Experts-Cleveland, Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland, Cleveland City Councilman Anthony Brancatelli, Cleveland Metroparks, Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s Fullerton School, Holden Forests & Gardens, Slavic Village Development, and Sustainable Cleveland 2019 for partnering on the event.



Arbor Day Art

Western Reserve Land Conservancy recently worked with two Cleveland artists to fabricate unique tree art designed to draw attention to the importance of trees in our community.

Lindsay Parker is a painter, a sculptor, a seamstress, and a craftsman. With an appreciation for arts, science, and the natural world, Parker created a new tree mascot for the Land Conservancy that steals the show with its leafy tree canopy.

ONE SQUARE MILE OF
**Family Farmland
Preserved**

We're a small family who operates a big farm and our goal is to make sure this land continues to be farmed.

The opportunity to preserve more than one square mile of Ohio’s most productive farmland today is rare.

Yet in 2018, Keith and Natalie Edwards donated a conservation easement on 656 contiguous acres of their Sandusky County farmland to Western Reserve Land Conservancy. This marks the second largest contiguous tract of land to be preserved in the Land Conservancy’s western region.

“Farming is in my blood,” remarked Keith Edwards. His father grew up on a farm and bought the original family property upon which Keith, Natalie, and their children have grown the Maple View Farms LLC operation. Today, they own more than 3,000 acres and farm a total of 5,200 acres, typically planted in corn and soybeans, and occasionally winter wheat.

“We’re a small family who operates a big farm,” he explained, “and our goal is to make sure this land continues to be farmed.”

After seeing the signs of urban sprawl, the Edwards family looked into ways to ensure their land would remain farmland forever. They spoke with local farmers and eventually reached out to Western Reserve Land Conservancy.

“When the land slated for conservation is the family business, decisions and discussions to preserve it can be complex and take significant time,” explained Andy McDowell, vice president of western field operations for the Land Conservancy. After years of deliberation, the family decided on preserving this section of their farming operation located in southeastern Sandusky County near the City of Clyde. Plans are already underway to preserve a second tract of land. McDowell added, “We commend the Edwards family for their decision to conserve this sizable tract of productive farmland and look forward to working with them on future projects.”



BELOVED VERMILION BEACH EXPANDS

Though not large in size, the Land Conservancy’s most recent project in Vermilion supports a much larger vision: creating public access to our Great Lake.

At the end of 2018, the Land Conservancy permanently conserved a key piece in Vermilion’s Harbour Town Historic District. Located immediately adjacent to Vermilion’s Main Street Beach, the project expands access to a beloved community beach and adjoins two additional coastal properties conserved with support of the Land Conservancy—the City of Vermilion’s Bluff Lakeshore Preserve and Erie MetroParks’ Wakefield Reservation. The Land Conservancy worked with local partners to demolish a vacant home on the property to provide

additional public open space as well as an alternative entryway to the beach.

Together, these properties provide 5.5 acres of beach access to Lake Erie. According to Andy McDowell, vice president of western field operations of the Land Conservancy, more than 80 percent of Lake Erie’s coastline is privately-owned in Ohio. He said, “Every effort to provide public access to one of our region’s greatest natural assets is important. This property in particular represented a once-in-a-generation opportunity to expand public access.”

McDowell explained that the Land Conservancy and its partners mobilized quickly to secure the property as it was at risk of being sold to a private buyer.

Some partners went at financial risk to acquire the property in late 2016 and hold the property while traditional fundraising took place. Ultimately, funding was provided through a national Land and Water Conservation Fund grant, a state NatureWorks grant, Erie MetroParks, and numerous individuals in the Vermilion community.

“We are extremely grateful for the generous support of community members, conservation organizations, and local officials,” added Stella Dilik, chief development officer for the Land Conservancy. “We could not have completed this project without the investment of these committed partners.”

Cleveland Property Inventory Update

REVEALS REDUCTION IN VACANT, DISTRESSED STRUCTURES

A new report issued by Western Reserve Land Conservancy shows a significant reduction in the number of vacant and distressed structures in 13 of Cleveland’s east side neighborhoods.

The report, *Cleveland Neighborhoods by the Numbers: 2018 East Side of Cleveland Update*, provides a parcel-by-parcel analysis of housing conditions captured through the Land Conservancy’s complete property inventory program in 2015 and includes the 2018 update.

In 2015, the Land Conservancy surveyed more than 158,800 parcels within the City of Cleveland. After strategic analysis, the Land Conservancy targeted and completed an update of the data in 13 of the most at-risk neighborhoods on Cleveland’s east side, which included more than 78,000 parcels in: Broadway-Slavic Village, Buckeye-Shaker Square, Buckeye-Woodhill, Collinwood-Nottingham, Fairfax, Glenville, Hough, Kinsman, Lee-Harvard, Lee-Seville, Mount Pleasant, St. Clair-Superior and Union Miles.

“In conjunction with continued efforts to stabilize the housing market, the resurvey of these neighborhoods provides critical insight into how the city continues to deal with population loss and a diminished demand for rapidly-aging housing,” said Isaac Robb, manager of urban projects for the Land Conservancy.

The report was funded by a \$100,000 grant from the Quicken Loans Community Fund.

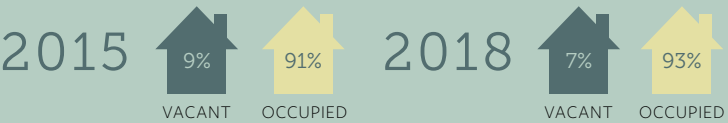
“At Quicken Loans, we know that the first step toward solving any problem is understanding it. That’s why it was so critical for us to support Western Reserve Land Conservancy in refreshing our data around blight in Cleveland,” said Bill Emerson, Vice Chairman of Quicken Loans. “Now, as a community, we can work together intentionally to preserve our historic housing stock, repurpose vacant land and attract businesses to continue moving our city forward.”

Our Key Findings:



reduction IN VACANT & DISTRESSED PROPERTIES

Demolition of blighted properties helps stabilize neighborhoods by restoring value to surrounding buildings. While the Land Conservancy does not demolish structures, it does advocate for the removal of vacant and abandoned buildings that undermine the housing market and act as a deterrent to homeowner wealth and equity. The most blighted structures undermining housing recovery, those rated D (Deteriorated) or F (Unsafe or Hazardous), have come down from 9% in 2015 to 6% in 2018.



The number of vacant structures graded D or F combined with the number of structures condemned by the City of Cleveland has come down from 9% in 2015 to 7% in 2018.

Nearly 3,750 have been demolished by the city and Cuyahoga Land Bank in these east side Cleveland neighborhoods since our last inventory in 2015.

slight decrease OF A- AND B-GRADED STRUCTURES

The percentage of structures graded A (Excellent) or B (Good) overall was similar in both surveys, dropping slightly from 68% in 2015 to 67% in 2018.

The percentage of A and B structures went up in four neighborhoods: 82%–87% in Buckeye-Shaker Square, 65–68% in Collinwood-Nottingham, 89%–95% in Lee-Harvard, 67%–77% Mount Pleasant.

increase OF C-GRADED STRUCTURES

The Land Conservancy’s 2018 property inventory update revealed the number of structures graded C (fair condition) increased from 23% in 2015 to 27% in 2018. In contrast to A and B-graded structures, C-graded structures typically need maintenance and repair. If properties requiring maintenance are not addressed in a timely manner, their continued deterioration could impact adjoining properties adding to the total number—and cost—of properties requiring rehabilitation or demolition.



MEDIAN HOME SALE PRICES HAVE increased

Median home sale prices have increased in each of the 13 east side Cleveland neighborhoods surveyed, though there are significant variations in the increases between each of the east side neighborhoods, as well as the surrounding communities.

Recent research conducted by the Land Conservancy reveals that many segments of the Cuyahoga County housing market have nearly fully recovered from the recession. This upward movement in home sale prices is a positive trend which corresponds to the across-the-board progress that has been made in blight reduction. However, these improvements must be seen in context. Housing prices have recovered only 31% in Cleveland’s east side neighborhoods, a pervasive loss of equity for homeowners in these communities.



PASSION GROWS ON TREES

Western Reserve Land Conservancy partners with Holden Forests & Gardens to provide Sherwick Tree Steward Trainings where interested individuals learn how to plant, care for, and maintain trees. Training residents to maintain existing and newly planted trees is critical to the success of the Cleveland Tree Plan and our collective reforestation work.

Each year, we highlight some of our outstanding Tree Stewards for their leadership in reforestation efforts in their neighborhoods. Congratulations to Keith Geary (Brunswick), Phil Kinson (Bay Village), Dan Leamon (Cleveland), and Dolores Watson (Cleveland) on being named Tree Stewards of the Year!

Our Tree Stewards of the Year spend countless hours committed to the cause of planting and maintaining trees and educating their communities about this work.



WHAT DRIVES THIS PASSION?

Keith Geary

Keith Geary is a faithful steward of trees in Cleveland who rarely misses a planting.



He leads, teaches, and is a master root excavator. When asked about his passion for this work, Keith noted, “The more I learn about the myriad of amazing benefits and services trees provide—environmental, economic, health, and quality of life—the more rewarding I find it to be able to assist in reforestation efforts in Cleveland and throughout Northeast Ohio.”

Dan Leamon

In order to water and care for newly planted trees in Cleveland’s Tremont neighborhood, Dan Leamon built his own tree watering wagon.



His passion stems from the desire to connect current and future generations to nature. He shared, “In the urban environment of Cleveland, trees bring us beauty and provide a necessary connection to nature and the world around us. Working to help reforest Cleveland, one tree at a time, provides satisfaction, especially knowing that these trees will be here, in some cases, several generations beyond me.”

Dolores Watson

As a collaborative community leader, Dolores Watson is working hard to host a tree planting and maintenance event in her own community, Cleveland’s Detroit Shoreway neighborhood.



Her passion for trees is a lifetime in the making—from hiking in the woods with her grandpa to gather black walnuts to creating pieces of art including a self-portrait in the form of a tree. “Over the years,” she shared, “I’ve learned much about trees and how valuable they are to us and the planet. I still have much to learn and am grateful for every opportunity to be more in touch with our dear companions—the trees.”

Western Reserve Land Conservancy is proud to partner with Holden Forests & Gardens to host the Sherwick Tree Steward Training program. More than 550 individuals have attended a Sherwick Tree Steward Training session and nearly 250 have graduated from the program since 2015. In 2018 alone, we engaged 136 new Tree Stewards and welcomed 75 to our graduate cohort!

Generous support for the program is provided by the Cleveland Foundation and the Ohio EPA Environmental Educational Fund, as well as many community partners.

Out and About



We hosted a terrific Vibrant Places Hike at Messenger Century Farm in Geauga County on March 9! Guests enjoyed a behind-the-scenes tour of the farm and maple-themed treats. Special thanks to our generous hosts, Dee and Bill Belew and their family, for a beautiful and educational morning on their 68-acre permanently conserved property. (Dee is pictured above with Pete McDonald, our Director of Land Stewardship.)



Special thanks to all who joined us for the annual Adam’s and Haley’s Run Cleanup in Southeast Akron! This year we celebrated the Opening Day for Trails in partnership with Rails-to-Trail Conservancy. We thank Rep. Tavia Galonski (OH District 35), a member of the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus, for providing welcoming remarks and Jason Segedy, City of Akron Director of Planning and Urban Development, for providing concluding remarks following the trail clean up. Additional thanks to Air Enterprises for generously sponsoring the event.

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TOUR

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LEARN

C

CELEBRATE

For more information about events, visit our website:
WRLANDCONSERVANCY.ORG/EVENTS

MAKE A DATE WITH CONSERVATION!

T ART SHOWS

MONDAY-FRIDAY | 8:30AM-5PM
CONSERVATION CENTER
Moreland Hills

Kim Zarney’s paintings, highlighting contemporary expressions of the natural world, will be on display through May 31, 2019. Donald Black Jr., photographer and youth educator, will host an exhibit in June and July showcasing humans behaving naturally in their environments. The Geauga Shutterbugs will host an exhibit of the club’s best nature photography in August and September. The Land Conservancy is open to the public Monday through Friday from 8:30AM-5PM.

T VIBRANT PLACES

We are pleased to bring back our Vibrant Places tour series in 2019! Experience the Land Conservancy’s work first hand by hiking new trails, connecting with family farmers, and exploring cherished keystone properties.

SUNDAY, JUNE 30 | 11AM-2PM
Cleveland

Cleveland will soon have a new 25-acre park! Explore this urban greenspace with the Land Conservancy, Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation, and community members on June 30. We encourage you to stay after the hike for lunch and our Common Ground community conversation on our environment.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 2 | 6-8PM
Hinckley

Back by popular demand, join us for a tasty exploration of Family Roots Farm, a permanently conserved organic garlic farm.

OHIO LAND BANK CONFERENCE

L WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 18-FRIDAY, SEPT. 20
Cincinnati

Interested in community revitalization efforts? Join us at our ninth annual conference where we’ll discuss re-purposing vacant and abandoned properties and revitalizing neighborhoods across Ohio.

C EVERGREEN EVERBLUE

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16 | 6PM
Cleveland

Save the date to join us for an exciting evening celebrating the roots of our land conservation and restoration work: supporting healthy, thriving communities.

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