



Superior Township Chapter

Update

Preserving the rural character and natural habitats of Superior Township
Summer 2025



Cherry Hill Nature Preserve through the seasons

Photo by Theo Poling

Perpetual Motion

By Brenda Baker, Co-Chair

Circumstances and the relentless passage of time have made the last year or so a period of transition for the Superior Township Chapter. Emerging from the pandemic years, the Chapter added the Midsummer Greenway Delight (nature walk) and took over hosting the Winter Walkabout (previously done by SMLC), resulting in a four-season set of annual hikes. The Garden (sub) Committee and groups of volunteers fulfilled our commitments under two adjacent grants near the entrance to the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve (one for the Native Plant and Insect Garden and one for the prairie/meadow area); now a reconstituted Garden Committee must forge ahead with maintaining and enhancing these installations.

Meanwhile, we have continued hosting a full-moon campfire, conducting workdays, participating in Superior Township's Superior Day event, and having a table at Washtenaw Community College's Fall and Winter Welcome Days. We also put out a summer newsletter (like this one).

see **Motion**, page 8

Joining Hands to Save the Lands

By Willy Secrest, Co-Chair

In 1987 most of the area where I'd just moved was up for sale as what some realtors described as "vacant lands." I've since come to realize that there are no "vacant lands." The open landscapes here in Superior Township provide—no, are—home for mushrooms and wildflowers, salamanders and frogs, fireflies, elderflowers, wild strawberries, oaks and maples, raccoons, coyotes, and more birds than I can count. For the past 37 years, SMLC has strategically operated to protect the "vacant lands" to preserve this fabric of life, maintaining and improving the well-being of the Township and we humans who also live here.

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Update

A newsletter published by:

Superior Township Chapter

of
Southeast Michigan
Land Conservancy



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

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Growing Up in Superior Twp

Growing up in Superior Township

By Theo Poling

When I was four years old, my family moved to Superior Township. Before coming here, my parents had met as students at the University of Michigan and elected to start their family in Ann Arbor. They loved the food, culture, and emphasis on community in TreeTown, USA. Something they missed, though, was a closer connection to nature, and more space for their large family, which is what drew them across the zip code boundary and into the bog-lined streets of Superior Township.

Growing up, my parents' house backed onto some wild, thorny, and invasive species-littered acreage. Each day, after school, I'd vanish into the woods. I practiced stepping silently on mossy patches, mimicking the way deer placed their steps with intent. I plunked my feet into the cold currents of Fleming Creek and searched for crawdads.

I spent most of my childhood wandering the woods alone and without supervision. I became a patient observer, and a seeker of gratitude and awe. I sat for hours under massive oak trees, watching the various inhabitants of the forest go about their lives—coyote, deer, opossums, raccoons, foxes, tortoises, squirrels, voles. I didn't have a thorough understanding of the geography or biology yet, which would come in time. It all just... was.

In some ways, this total, childish ignorance was a blessing. It meant I was often surprised in the most wonderful way. One humid summer, my best friend and I went biking in my parents' neighborhood. We arced up and down the big, hilly streets; stopping our wheels at random and inspecting the landscaping like we were members of the HOA.

Late in the afternoon, we pulled over on a cul-de-sac where a tall and wild meadow sprawled by the side of the road. It was shepherded by willow trees and looked out over Cherry Hill Road and a lake beyond that. It was idyllic in a Van Gogh way, dry and yellow and gorgeous in the summer sun. We began to explore the meadow, and weaved through the willow trees, their hanging boughs brushing our shoulders like concerned matriarchs. I noticed a deer trail beaten into the dirt and began to follow it.

After crawling under many a thorny raspberry bush and crashing through many a dry twig like the world's loudest bushwhacker, we fell into a massive clearing.

It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. The forest landscape had transformed, and our skin cooled off under the thick, shadowy canopy of hundreds of mature oak trees. The paths were well-trodden and surrounded by aged boulders blanketed in lichen. Bird chirps echoed, vibrating sharply against my ear drums.

At that tender age, I was briefly convinced I had been transported

see **Growing**, page 6



Explore Superior Township's Beautiful Preserves

By Rhonda McGill

Discover our natural gems...

In our busy lives, it's easy to overlook the profound benefits of stepping away from screens and immersing ourselves in nature. Here in Superior Township, we are incredibly fortunate to have a network of beautiful land preserves, offering peaceful havens for reflection, recreation, and connecting with the natural world.

Each visit to a nature preserve provides a unique opportunity to recharge, reduce stress, and gain a fresh perspective. Whether you enjoy a leisurely stroll, a vigorous hike, or simply observing the vibrant birdlife, our township's preserves are rich with assets waiting to be explored. These outdoor classrooms serve as critical habitats for local wildlife and offer quiet escapes from everyday life. It's up to all of us to take an interest in their preservation.

The Superior Township Chapter is dedicated to helping conserve these precious natural spaces for current and future generations. But we can't do it alone! SMLC's work, which ranges from trail maintenance to land acquisition and educational programs, relies heavily on community support.

We invite you to visit one of the many preserves right here in our backyard and experience the beauty and tranquility firsthand. While you're there, consider how you can help protect these vital natural resources. If you'd prefer to hike with a group, be sure to check out one of our quarterly guided hikes led by an experienced Naturalist. Our next hike: **Midsummer Greenway Delight** will be on **Sunday, August 24th at Cherry Hill Nature Preserve.**

Get Involved!

Whether it's making a contribution of your time, or finances, or joining us for one of our hikes, learn how you can get involved by visiting www.smlcland.org/superior.

Together, we can ensure that Superior Township's natural beauty thrives for generations to come.



Giant Swallowtail Butterfly in LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve

Photo by Bill Sverdlik



**The Conservancy Farm's
array of Black-eyed Susans**

Photo by Jim Weiner

In Memoriam

Mark David Higbee passed away February 13, 2025. He was 65. Mark had a long, distinguished career teaching American History at Eastern Michigan University. Outside of work, he advocated for a number of social causes including land conservation, and was a member of our Superior Township Chapter Steering Committee. Mark is survived by his wife, Kate Levin, and two sons.

Marion S. Morris passed away March 24, 2025 at age 87. Marion was a founding member of the Superior Land Conservancy and later helped lead the Superior Land Preservation Society. She served for many years on the Superior Township Parks & Recreation Commission, including several years as its Chair. Her husband, Peter, predeceased her. She is survived by three children and six grandchildren.

Robert Henry ("Bob") Schultz passed away June 1, 2025 at age 84. He was a lifelong resident of Ypsilanti/Superior Township, where he owned and operated several farms. A friend of land conservation, Bob protected a portion of his land under conservation easements including with SMLC. He is survived by two brothers. He will be missed.

Joining, continued from pg. 1

This year I'm encouraged to welcome some new recruits to our all-volunteer Superior Township Chapter Steering Committee. Their articles in this issue express their devotion and commitment to nature and her conservation. Some other wonderful news is that our Township, with the support and assistance of our non-profit conservation allies, has recently confirmed the preservation of an additional 464 acres, part of which will become the BirdSong Nature Preserve. One hundred forty-one acres of the new acquisition will be set aside to establish the Superior Township Community Farm, giving folks space and assistance to grow their own food. All this newly preserved land is directly adjacent to the Cherry Hill Nature Preserve organized by SMLC back in 1995, creating yet another contiguous greenbelt of 624 acres through the heart of our community and providing a home for Mother Nature in the midst of the ever-sprawling metroplex of Southeast Michigan!

Walking the preserves in our Township's landscapes, we appreciate the trees and the cooling air they furnish, not just for us, but for all the life sheltering amidst their arching branches. We're humbled to be welcomed into the home of so many of the creatures - flora and fauna - that share the township with us. If you, too, feel this way, don't just be glad for what STC and the SMLC are doing—join us. Our world is in your hands ...

Visit smlcland.org to sign on...



**Clouds cover the
Conservancy Farm**

Photo by Joel Geffen



Message from SMLC

by Jim McIntyre, SMLC President

Superior Township has long been a cornerstone of the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy's conservation mission. This connection grows stronger as local supporters continue to join with SMLC to protect and care for some of the region's most valued natural and agricultural spaces. With committed volunteers, engaged township leaders, and a shared vision for the future, conservation in Superior Township continues to thrive.

At LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve, recent stewardship workdays have brought community members together to tackle invasive species, restore habitats, and enhance trail access. These efforts are already bearing fruit: native wildflowers are rebounding in freshly cleared areas, and public access improvements are making the preserve more welcoming to visitors of all ages. Just across Vreeland road, the Conservancy Farm has been the site of several stewardship events, with volunteers planting native trees, clearing brush, and reconnecting with the land in meaningful, hands-on ways.

Alongside these on-the-ground successes, SMLC recently completed a comprehensive strategic planning process. This plan sets clear priorities for the years ahead—focusing on protecting additional land, stewardship, operational excellence, and impactful community engagement. The feedback and involvement of our Superior Township community played a key role in shaping this vision, ensuring that future work reflects both ecological needs and local values.

Our Superior Township supporters continue to demonstrate what's possible when conservation is rooted in community. Your voices, energy, and leadership have helped protect more than just open space—they've cultivated a landscape of care, connection, and long-term stewardship.

On behalf of SMLC, I want to extend my deepest thanks to the residents, partners, and volunteers of Superior Township. Your dedication and generosity are at the heart of our work. Together, we are preserving more than just land—we are sustaining a legacy.

TRAILBLAZERS FOR SMLC

A Matching Grant Campaign to Support Local Land Conservation Now

Typically, environmental charitable giving remains a lower priority among the nation's donors, and this year's federal uncertainties have increased funding pressures on SMLC's budget and its mission.

Consequently, SMLC is asking for help NOW with a summer fundraising campaign, Trailblazers for SMLC!

How to help?

1.Support SMLC to help sustain local land conservation.

2.Raise awareness of the importance of local land conservation and SMLC's mission.

3.Promote SMLC's preserves—sing the praises of your favorite view—and encourage new folks to visit.

4.Move SMLC forward faster through new donor engagement—send in a bonus donation or encourage a new supporter to volunteer or give.

To increase the fundraising impact, Superior Township residents and ardent SMLC supporters Bill Secrest and Misty Callies will match up to \$10,000 in donations from new donors and new money (additional dollars from current donors) by September 28. Achieving this goal will bring in \$20,000 beyond SMLC's typical summer giving returns, a significant boon to counteract this year's shortfalls.

Join Trailblazers for SMLC, have a gift matched NOW, and help SMLC continue its longstanding and successful land conservation work.

Please go to smlcland.org for more information.

Independence Day Report

By Willy Secrest

This morning I went out to stroll the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve as I often do. The Native Plant and Insect Garden, first created and maintained by former STC Steering Committee members Cathy Bach, Carla Bisaro, and Michelle McIntyre, with the help of many workday volunteers, is just across Cherry Hill Road from the Superior Township Hall. Now of wondrous beauty, the colorful wildflowers and tall grasses have become a small meadow, and I was surprised by an astonishing flock of seldom seen sora waterbirds taking shelter there. This brief moment illustrates the results of what STC volunteers do for our community.

As I followed the path leading down from the meadow across Fowler Creek, a pristine tributary of the Rouge River, I appreciated how it's mowed and maintained by George Kasdorf, one of SMLC's key environmental heroes. George volunteers several days nearly every week servicing SMLC equipment, maintaining trails and infrastructure, and performing other vital jobs needed to keep SMLC preserves tip-top.

These vital, if relatively unknown, local volunteers are keeping our countryside a cause for true celebration. Hats off!!!



Fall leaves are just around the corner at the Springhill Nature Preserve Photo by Charles Scott

Growing, continued from pg. 2

to a magical fairy tale land, that I was now a protagonist of a Narnia-like story. I explored those woods until long after dark. My phone had died and my parents were angry and worried sick, but nothing could take me from those trees except for the moon's reminder that life is not just wandering in the woods.

I found out later that the forest was called Cherry Hill Nature Preserve, and that I'd lived next to it for many years without ever being aware of it. After that day, though—and for the last twenty years—I have visited Cherry Hill Nature Preserve nearly every week of my life. I have also expanded my botanical horizons and tromped through LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve, through Secrest Nature Preserve, and through many other beautiful properties stewarded by the SMLC and their partners.

I never lose sight of how precious our natural environment is, and how persistently the existential threat against it lurks. Each day that I drive down Prospect Road or walk across a boardwalk surrounded by wildflowers, I feel an intense sense of gratitude. I feel completely humbled and speechless that I can experience this, that I am alive for this, and that I get to be one of the many mammals that lifts its nose to the sky and breathes in deeply, inhaling the wild scents of the woods.

For me, SMLC has been a progenitor of a rare and precious gift, and has directly shaped the trajectory of my life and what moves my soul. I hope to give back as much as I can, and to protect the lives of those in my earthen community, both plant and animal, vertebrate and invertebrate.

I hope, more than anything, that I am not the last to look up at these trees and feel that same, beautiful sense of smallness and interconnectedness.

Get Email Updates from SMLC

Don't miss out on the latest Conservancy news, events, and announcements. If your address has changed, be sure to let us know that too.



To sign up, please send an email to: info@smlcland.org



Birder Heaven

By Bill Sverdlik

This summer, I will end my full-time teaching career at Eastern Michigan University. I started teaching at EMU in 1981; it has been a dream job. I love the classroom and I have every intention of returning, albeit on a less formal, part-time basis. But now...what to do? That's easy: I now have the rare opportunity to truly indulge my hobbies on a full-time basis. Birds, butterflies, dragonflies. Basically, anything with wings interests me, as well as flowers, frogs and anything else I find "out in the woods."

But it's getting more difficult to observe wildlife locally; I live in Ann Arbor. The city is experiencing tremendous growth and construction and I like to birdwatch in areas where I can visit weekly throughout the year. Watching and listening to the seasons change soothes the soul. And it makes me happy!

Vreeland and Gotfredson Roads have always been favorite winter spots for me: one of the most reliable places to see Horned Larks, Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs. Throw in the occasional owl or raptor, especially the rarer Snowy Owl or Rough-legged Hawk and one is in "birder heaven." Over the past few years, I have become aware of several of the preserves under the auspices of SMLC: LeFurge Woods, Jack R. Smiley, Conservancy Farm. I walk the Superior Greenway Nature trail several times a week. Here, in a very short distance, I am able to encounter marshes, grasslands and woodlands. Visiting LeFurge Woods, one can see migrating warblers and then take a few steps and hear marsh wrens and swamp sparrows. The backwoods of LeFurge have one of the largest stands of white trillium I've ever seen. Ambling through the grassland of the Conservancy Farm one encounters Bobolinks, Savannah Sparrows and Meadowlarks. The preserves of the SMLC are the perfect place to watch nature throughout the year.

I've gotten to know a few people that make up this wonderful organization. I'm impressed by the commitment of folks, the sense of community and the overall breadth of knowledge. This is very similar to a university environment. No wonder I like it. I am very excited to become part of this family and contribute however I may.

Upcoming Events

Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy
in Superior Township

August 24 Sunday 1:15pm – 3:45pm	Midsummer Greenway Delight (walk) Cherry Hill Nature Preserve (6375 Cherry Hill Rd., Superior Twp.)
September 6 Saturday 7:00pm – 10:00pm	Full Moon Campfire (gathering) LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve (2252 N. Prospect Rd., Superior Twp.)
October 19 Sunday 1:15pm – 3:45pm	Autumn Spectacular (walk) Cherry Hill Nature Preserve (6375 Cherry Hill Rd., Superior Twp.)



Coming in for a landing... Photo by Charles Scott

Yes! I want to help preserve critical natural habitat in southeast Michigan by supporting Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy.

\$_____ Total Gift ☐ Check here to let SMLC use my gift where it is needed most.

Or, direct my donation:

\$_____ Stewardship Fund \$_____ Superior Township Fund

\$_____ Land Protection Fund \$_____ Stewardship Endowment 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 smlcland.org

Name: _____

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City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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Email: _____

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

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.*

Motion, continued from pg. 1

Concurrently with our activities, the composition of our Steering Committee has also continued to evolve. Former members Cathy Bach and Michelle McIntyre elected a couple of years ago to step away from the Steering Committee while participating with the Chapter in other ways; then last year Carla Bisaro was forced to scale back her efforts for personal reasons, while Mark Higbee sadly passed away earlier this year.

New volunteers Rhonda McGill and TC Collins joined the STC Steering Committee toward the end of 2024, bringing fresh ideas and new perspectives to the Chapter. Theo Poling, Hannah Briggs, and Bill Sverdlik are newer still, having just completed the confirmation process in July. You can read about Theo and Bill elsewhere in this newsletter.

They say the only constant in life is change [Heraclitus], and the Superior Township Chapter is no exception. On balance, this is a good thing as we strive to keep pace with technological and social advancements while land and nature give the erroneous illusion of being fixed in time.

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