



LANDMARKS

Newsletter of the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy

Spring 2026



The agricultural landscape at Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve

Photo by Charles Scott

SMLC's Conservation Principles for Land Use

By Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director

Earlier this year, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy's Board considered the emerging trend of new data centers in this region since it is the fastest growing area for potential or planned new data centers in Michigan (MLive "News", 12-16-25). Although some data centers already exist in Michigan, the concerns being expressed now seem to be focused on their planned location, size, environmental impact, and energy usage, among other considerations. Furthermore, awareness of potential impacts can be challenging given the speed with which many of these projects have made their way through permitting and regulatory processes. Ideally, communities can have a better understanding of the ways these projects may affect them.

However, land use change in general is not a new topic. Other developmental changes, including their placement, that can generate community support or opposition include solar and wind installations, gravel mining, and big box stores, to name a few. Some of the considerations for new developments such as

these include: are there any changes that will occur to existing natural lands, farmland and open space, and will there be any negative impacts to the property's or surrounding area's natural resources (such as rivers or other waterways, forests and prairies).

The Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (SMLC) works to conserve natural areas and open space (including farmland) across southeast Michigan. As communities evaluate proposals for new or expanded development - including but not limited to data centers - questions can arise about potential impacts to local lands and waters.

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LANDMARKS

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Conservation is in our Nature.

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Superior Township, MI 48198

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smlcland.org



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Message from the Executive Director, Jill A. Lewis



Land use and conservation are on the minds of many Michiganders as the state has become a hot spot for data center development. Although land use change in local communities is not new, understanding these projects more fully including their potential impacts on the land and natural resources is important. In light of these recent trends, the SMLC Board adopted guiding conservation principles for land use decision-making (see page 1).

Regarding conserving local lands, the Huron River Watershed Council and Friends of the Rouge invited SMLC to sit on two advisory committees. I have been participating with the Huron River Watershed Investment Strategy Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) since last June and the Johnson Creek Project Advisory Committee since February. Both groups seek to conserve more natural lands and open space in these watersheds - the TAC through financial investments, and both through the identification of priority parcels to protect.

In addition, I'm excited to share that SMLC has been working on a new conservation easement project in Canton with a goal of closing this summer. This beautiful 30-acre wooded parcel is important to protect given its conservation values and that Fellows Creek, a cold-water tributary runs through it.



SMLC has also engaged in outreach through the Collective (WCC) and recent community events were held in Ann Arbor (see page 10), Augusta Township, and Brighton. In Augusta Township, the WCC held a landowner information session about protecting and stewarding private lands. Additionally, I spoke with members of the Brighton Garden Club about land conservation and recent SMLC projects. Later this month I will be presenting to the Belleville Area District Library and Rotary Club members. If you are interested in hosting SMLC at your upcoming civic or community event, please let us know.

As I reflect on 2025 and this year's Annual Report (see pages 4-7), I am especially grateful for all of the donors, funders, sponsors and volunteers who have given generously to help SMLC achieve our mission and new Strategic Plan. **Thank you!**

Finally, if you are looking to volunteer at a leadership level, consider joining one of SMLC's committees. These groups support governance and operational work since many hands lighten the load. Committees looking for new members include: Finance, Land Protection, Stewardship, Event Planning, Fundraising, and the Superior Township Chapter's Steering Committee. For more information, including job descriptions and required experience, please contact the office.

Thank you for your support of SMLC's mission and local land conservation!



Save the Date - 2026 Walk in Wonder

By Misty Callies, Event Committee Chair

Change! Support! Help!

How often can you do those things in today's world simply by

- putting one foot in front of the other?
- enjoying a sunny day outside with your family?
- spotting the bluebirds flitting in the meadow?
- asking a friend to join in celebrating the natural world?

Walk in Wonder, SMLC's 2026 hike-a-thon,

will open up a new way to support land conservation while walking its preserves, sharing discoveries with others, and maybe even competing for a prize or two!

Walk all seven signature preserves or search for the hidden beauty spot!

Post photos and adventures and bring others into the SMLC fold!

Tick off enough preserves to enter a drawing for a fabulous prize!

Opening Day: June 27 with a guided hike kickoff at Lost Lake Nature Preserve, SMLC's northern-most property. Check off your first preserve!

Celebration Finale: August 30 at the Conservancy Farm featuring a guided hike, food and drinks, prizes and SMLC's biennial awards.

Registration begins June 9; \$45/person (Additional donations \$45 requested minimum)
Hiking will run from June 27 - August 24



Thank You KATHY!

For 6 years of excellent service. SMLC wishes you the best in your retirement.



Thank you! to all of the in-store shoppers who helped raise nearly \$12,000 for SMLC through Columbia Sportswear's "Tough Mother Funder" partnership with Land Trust Alliance for local conservation.

Support SMLC and Land Conservation this Spring

1. Make an online donation at www.smlcland.org as part of our **Spring Appeal**. Giving options including PayPal and Network for Good.
2. Become an **Eco-Logical Leadership Club (ELLC)** member with your unrestricted gift of \$1,000 or more. **ELLC** members receive special event invites and information throughout the year.
3. Sponsor the **Walk in Wonder Hike-a-thon**. The event goals are:
 - Encourage hikers to explore SMLC's nature preserves and share experiences with others
 - Raise funds for SMLC's mission and programs in 2026 (the fundraising goal is \$15,000) and,
 - Promote the wonder and beauty of southeast Michigan's natural world

To learn more about becoming an ELLC member or Walk in Wonder Sponsor, please contact Jill Lewis, jlewis@smlcland.org or 734-484-6565.



Sandhill cranes in the Superior Greenway
Photo by Wendy Pellerito

President's Message

By Jim McIntyre, SMLC Board President

Each passing year offers an opportunity to pause and reflect on what we've accomplished together. Looking back on 2025, I'm excited to see the progress SMLC continues to make toward protecting the places that make our region unique.

Throughout the year, we remained focused on our core mission: conserving and caring for the natural lands of southeast Michigan. Volunteers spent countless hours helping monitor preserves, removing invasive species, and maintaining the landscapes entrusted to our care. At the same time, our staff, contractors, and partners continued advancing land protection efforts that will safeguard important natural areas for generations to come. This included the completion of the DNR-funded Forest to MI Faucet project last June. Several SMLC preserves benefited from prescribed fire and newly planted trees during the past couple of years.

One of our most important efforts this year was the completion of SMLC's strategic planning process. The new plan helps clarify where we should focus our energy in the future, particularly when it comes to protecting additional open spaces across our region. In the years to come, SMLC will be working diligently to expand the amount of land permanently protected in southeast Michigan through strategic acquisitions



A crew of U of M students and other volunteers after some successful buckthorn-clearing.

Photo by Alan McTaggart

and strong partnerships with communities and conservation partners.

2025 also marked the launch of our Trailblazers for SMLC fundraising campaign. The campaign represents an important step toward expanding the community of supporters who make our work possible and will help us provide the resources needed to protect additional natural lands across southeast Michigan. We appreciate everyone who took part in last year's event, and we're excited to add new events as we continue expanding our outreach and fundraising activities.

I also want to recognize some changes in board membership this year. A special thank you goes out to Chris Flanagan for his service and contributions during his time on the SMLC Board of Directors. I'm also pleased to welcome Carol Poenisch to the Board and look forward to her involvement in supporting SMLC's mission.

Protecting land is always a long-term effort. None of this work happens without the support of the people who believe in our mission. To our donors, volunteers, staff, and community partners...thank you! It's often difficult to find the words to express the level of gratitude we have for everyone whose efforts make our work possible, but know this: because of your continued support, SMLC is helping ensure that the forests, wetlands, and open spaces of southeast Michigan remain protected, cared for, and available for the communities that depend on them—both today and for generations to come—and for that we are deeply grateful.



Nature offers space and time for reflection

Photo by Charles Scott



SMLC Welcomes New Leadership

By Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director

This winter, Carol Poenisch joined the Board for a 3-year term. Carol is a retired Detroit Public Schools Physical Education Teacher and an active runner. She is a volunteer for Northville Township commissions and organizations including for brownfield development. Carol is inspired by SMLC’s mission and is deeply committed to the preservation of local natural areas. She has a Master’s degree in Public Health from Indiana University.

The Superior Township Chapter’s Steering Committee added Hannah Briggs, Theo Poling, and Bill Sverdluk this past summer. All have a passion for the environment and nature, especially in the Township. Hannah has experience as a biologist and with invasive species removal. Theo and Bill (retired) are from Eastern Michigan University with a strong interest in preserving the natural world around them from woods to fields and birds to butterflies.

Ken Guerrini joined the Finance Committee this spring. He is a retired finance executive having been a Vice President of Finance and Business Operations, controller and auditor during his career. Ken is an avid hiker and he enjoys parks and trails believing these make cities livable. He has a Master’s of Accounting and Business Management from the University of Michigan’s Stephen M. Ross School of Business.



Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy Trailblazers for SMLC

Thank you to our sponsors!

Bill Secret & Misty Callies
Matching Gift Sponsors



SMLC is deeply grateful to all of the individuals and volunteers who helped make this fundraising campaign a success

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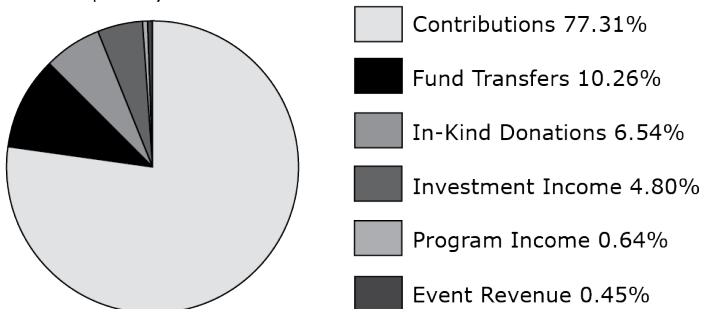


Don't miss out on the latest Conservancy news, events, and announcements. If your address has changed, be sure to let us know that too.

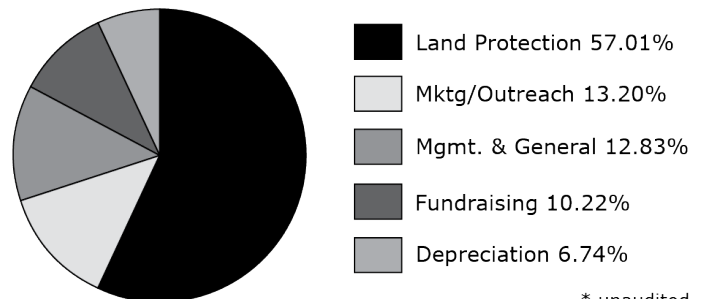
To sign up, please email: info@smlcland.org

2025 Financial Report

Revenue and Fund Transfers
\$330,051*



Expenses
\$302,239*



* unaudited



Thank You

for supporting our Mission in 2025!

The Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy extends appreciation to all of our generous donors. Your 2025 contributions made it possible for SMLC to continue to protect and preserve natural lands and open space in southeast Michigan.

We apologize for any errors and omissions. If something is incorrect, please let us know.

Gifts from Foundations & Organizations

\$50,000 & up

Anonymous

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James A. & Faith Knight Foundation
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ELLCC Ecological Leadership Club



If you are interested in joining the Eco-Logical Leadership Giving Club (ELLCC), please contact Jill Lewis, Executive Director at jlewis@smlcland.org



Memorial Donations

In Memory of Irene Cole

By Patricia Cole

In Memory of Mark Higbee

By Katie Levin

In Memory of Judy Koppin

By Robert Moll

In Memory of Herbert Giese

By Robert Moll

In Memory of Daniel R. Sard

By Glen Sard

In Memory of Ela Jiga

By Roger Corpolongo

In Memory of Joan L. Wojack

By Kathleen & Bryan Hammond

In Memory of Maureen Alexandrowicz

By Robert Moll

In Memory of Janet Garahan

By Robert Moll

Monitoring Sibley Prairie's Vernal Pools

By Alan McTaggart, Stewardship and Outreach Specialist

Vernal pools are defined as being “small, isolated wetlands that occur in forest settings” and “experience cyclic periods of water inundation and drying, typically filling with water in the spring or fall and drying during the summer or in drought years” per the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI). They usually form on top of mineral soils underlain by an impermeable layer such as clay, and are sometimes covered by a layer of roots and dead leaves.

They tend to be a relatively small feature on the landscape, so people can overlook them. However, as more information has come out about their ecological value in recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on their protection within conservation circles. Many species of plants and animals find critical habitat in vernal pools. Some species are especially adapted to live in or at least spend some phase of their lives in them.

Historically, vernal pools have not been well-documented in Michigan due to their small size and temporary nature. This lack of documentation makes it



A mass of wood frog eggs found at West Prairie

Photo by Alan McTaggart

more difficult to put adequate legal protection in place for them. MNFI and numerous partner organizations launched the “Vernal Pool Patrol Program” in 2012 to tackle the issue. The primary objectives of this program are to identify and map the location of vernal pools, particularly in locations where they tend to form year-after-year. Citizen scientists and professional researchers go into the field to gather geo-spatial and biological data on pools with the ultimate goal of compiling databases. This information will

ultimately be available to policymakers and stakeholders who can use it to guide the creation of more robust land protections for where vernal pools occur. The process by which these data are collected is called “monitoring”.

I recently had the pleasure of joining a consortium of conservationists hailing from multiple organizations at SMLC’s Sibley Prairie Nature Preserve - West



Participants in the West Prairie monitoring event examine samples from the nearby vernal pool.

Photo by Alan McTaggart

Prairie to examine vernal pools. The event’s goals were those of the Vernal Pool Patrol Program, but it also served as a means of generating information and publicity about the “Save Sibley Prairie” project (see page 9). The group consisted of personnel from MNFI and the Black to the Land Coalition as well as a couple social media influencers who shared the efforts with their online community. Many were already involved with the Save Sibley Prairie project.

During our monitoring, we found: fingernail clams, flatworms, copepods, isopods, and midge larvae, among other fascinating creatures. We also found wood frog eggs, a vernal pool indicator (see page 11). Overall, it was another confirmation of the ecological value of the Sibley Prairie. SMLC and other conservation groups have been involved in the conservation of the Sibley Prairie for decades, and the Save Sibley Prairie project is yet another example of the power of conservation collaboration.

Visit smleland.org for a color version of this newsletter





A standard SMLC boundary sign
 Photo by Mike Solomon

Nature Preserve Signage

By Alan McTaggart, Stewardship and Outreach Specialist

Property boundaries and rules are two of the most important considerations for land conservancies that own land. When an organization endeavors to preserve the natural integrity of lands they own, they need to ensure property boundary security while also establishing rules that protect natural habitat and keep visitors safe.

Even when you have good neighbors and well-meaning visitors, mistakes can happen, resulting in someone unknowingly engaging in an undesirable activity (ex. riding an ATV onto a preserve). Additionally, trespassers can also intentionally disregard preserve rules. In both cases, having visible and adequately placed signage is important. Signs establish boundary locations and clearly state what is allowed or prohibited. Therefore, one can rest assured that they are doing valuable conservation work if they find themselves posting signs, no matter how mundane the task may seem!

Last summer many field hours were spent posting preserve signage, and this summer will be similar. Many thanks to last year's helpers, Hayden Allie and Michael Solomon, who made the task easier. Thanks too, to the Land Trust Alliance, for providing a 2026 grant for purchasing more rules signs. These will continue to be installed at trailheads, preserve entrances, and areas with ongoing issues.

SAVE SIBLEY PRAIRIE COALITION



The Save Sibley Prairie Coalition has been actively working to protect 440 acres located in Brownstown Township and the ecological region known as the Greater Sibley Complex. As a member of the Coalition, SMLC has been involved in this effort since last summer. Our role has largely been one of assisting with the Coalition's stewardship efforts. This past February, members of the Coalition, SMLC and The Nature Conservancy, met onsite to review the property. We learned a lot and came away even more inspired to protect one of the last vestiges of globally rare lakeplain prairie in Michigan.

The Coalition's Stewardship Committee met during the winter and produced a preliminary management plan that can be used by the future property owner. The management plan includes guidance regarding natural resources management and prairie restoration, and a concept plan for possible future public access. To learn more about the Coalition and how you can support this work, please visit www.savesibleyprairie.org.



Members of the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition discuss findings during a site visit to the 440-acre property.
 Photo by Alan McTaggart

Tabling to Tie Us Together

By Theo Poling, Superior Township Committee Member

On March 28, several SMLC Superior Township Chapter members—myself, Brenda, and Willy—took shifts tabling on behalf of SMLC and its important work at the Michigan Bluebird Society's Spring Bluebird Festival at Washtenaw Community College.

I walked into the large lobby to find a busy throng of people eating lunch, mingling, and coming together over bluebirds. A van dropped off our community's elders from a local retirement home, and parents held the hands of their curious young children. People from all backgrounds in Washtenaw County and beyond came to celebrate and discuss the impact of the humble bluebird.

The event centered on bluebirds, yes, but made space for a variety of organizations and discussions around wildlife in general, outdoor activities and education, and local opportunities. Our table was tucked into a lovely corner, bookended on either side by the Leslie Science & Nature Center and the Howell Nature Center, two local organizations doing crucial work for local species in need.

I engaged with dozens of people across waves of foot traffic. I spied about SMLC's work, preserves, and upcoming events to many curious faces; received donations; and spoke at length with several people about the majesty of our local environs, including places like LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve.

At the end of the day, just showing up with a table and chair makes a huge difference. More people know about SMLC than before and our work to preserve local beauty. Because of one lovely afternoon, our community has grown bigger.



Hikers at STC's annual springtime hike

Photo by Scott Tyrrell

Two volunteers removing invasive shrubs

Photo by Cassie Russ



Many thanks to our volunteers...

To the **Landmarks** newsletter contributors: Misty Callies, Jim McIntyre, and Theo Poling.

To our **photographers**: Laura Myatt, Wendy Pellerito, Cassie Russ, Charles Scott, Mike Solomon, Scott Tyrrell.

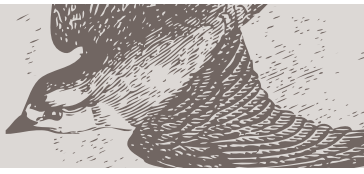
To the volunteers who have helped with our **stewardship, legal assistance, and outreach**: Brian Ankrapp, Brenda Baker, Carla Bisaro, Jacob Burger, Misty Callies, Marisa Chuey, Mary Ericson, Toby Hartman, Allie Jameson, George Kasdorf, Fredric Lund, Jim McIntyre, Megan Miller, Robert Moll, Madden Pasatta, Mae Pasatta, Sarah Patterson, Ryan Poling, Theo Poling, Cassie Russ, Bill Secrest, Charlie Spencer, Bill Sverdlik, Jim Weiner, Merrick Witkowski, and Kay Youmans.

And *especially* to our dedicated **Committee Members**: Brenda Baker, Dick Barnes, Hannah Briggs, Misty Callies, Bryan Collett, TC Collins, Don DeMallie, Mary Ericson, Chris Flanagan, Heidi Guenther, Mike Hahn, Mitch Hall, Steve Hall, Richard Kent, Allison LaPlatt-Weaver, Fredric Lund, Rhonda McGill, Jim McIntyre, Michelle McIntyre, Robert Moll, Jacob Olsen-Yesh, Theo Poling, Jon Richards, Bill Secrest, Shawn Severance, Jack Smiley, Bill Sverdlik, Jon Trevathan, and Jim Weiner.

Thanks to **everyone** who volunteered with SMLC in the past year!

We are always looking for dedicated people who want to help SMLC achieve our mission. For more information, please contact Alan McTaggart at amctaggart@smlcland.org or call 734-484-6565.





Wood Frogs at Sibley Prairie

By Alan McTaggart, SMLC Stewardship Committee Member

Did you know that the wood frog (*Lithobates sylvaticus*) is a vernal pool indicator species? As their common name implies, these frogs spend their lives in wooded areas and vegetated wetlands as opposed to year-round streams or ponds. Wood frogs lay eggs in large masses; sometimes up to 1,500 of them. The eggs are attached to small branches, twigs, or sedges that are present in water, and this is why vernal pools are crucial for them. A vernal pool is seasonal by nature, filling-up in spring and drying up by some point during the summer. This prevents fish from establishing residence in these pools, and since fish would eat these eggs, wood frogs exclusively lay eggs in vernal pools, making the presence of their eggs an indicator that a woodland water body is a true vernal pool.

When it isn't time to breed, the frogs still live in their forest homes, spending most of their time on the forest floor. Though they are a relatively small animal, they can range widely (hundreds of meters, in their case) to move between different habitats, spending summers in lower, wetter parts of the forest before

migrating into upland areas in the fall where they will hibernate over-winter under the leaf litter. These upland areas tend to be near spots where vernal pools form so that their trip to breeding areas the following year isn't as long.

During a recent vernal pool monitoring event at Sibley Prairie Nature Preserve-West Prairie, the group that gathered there including myself, members of the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI), Black to the Land and others (see page 8), found several wood frog egg masses in the ponds we sampled, illustrating ecological health at the site. If all goes well, these eggs will become tadpoles in approximately 9-30 days before emerging onto land as adult frogs this summer.



Wood frog

Photo by Laura Myatt

Continued from page 1

To help guide those decisions, the SMLC Board approved the following **SMLC Conservation Principles for Land Use**.

- **SMLC's mission** is to conserve natural areas including woods, wetlands and prairies (grasslands) and open space including farmland. We promote the preservation of these invaluable natural and community resources.
- **SMLC encourages** thorough evaluation of all real or possible negative impacts to wetlands and waterways, woodlands and grasslands, and agricultural lands. If there are alternate locations that would not impact (or lessen the impact to) these natural and agricultural areas, SMLC encourages land use decisions that promote siting on and development of these alternate locations.
- **SMLC believes** that re-use of urban locations

including brownfields and former developed sites, rather than development of natural areas and agricultural lands, should be encouraged.

- **SMLC believes** that all required federal and state regulatory and local approval processes should be followed; plus, whenever development of a natural area is proposed there should be adequate time afforded to allow for public input and consideration of all relevant information.
- **Additionally, SMLC encourages** the review of potential climate change and environmental justice factors when considering site locations.
- **SMLC encourages** all landowners to consider land preservation as an option when contemplating the future of your land. Conserving your land is a great way to preserve family legacy, rural or cultural heritage, and local natural and agricultural areas.

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 |
|--|-------------|
| 3-point hitch tractor wood chipper attachment | \$2,500 |
| New window air conditioning unit | \$300 |
| New or gently-used folding hand-saws | \$22 each |
| New or gently-used loppers | \$15 each |
| Bottled water for thirsty volunteers (24 pack) | \$4 each |



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