



Superior Township Chapter

Update

Preserving the rural character and
natural habitats of Superior Township

Summer 2026



Summer at the Jack R. Smiley Meadow

Photo by Theo Poling

Partners

By Brenda Baker, Co-Chair

These days, it seems like most nonprofits and community-facing groups have one or more partners with many of the projects they undertake. When I first became aware of this, thirty or more years ago, I thought it was creative and acceptable “cheating.” An organization wants to do a project, but they lack the critical mass (funding, people, outreach) to be able to do it. Rather than saying, “That’s more than we can handle,” someone says, “Let’s get a partner to help us.”

I don’t know why that struck me as cheating. There’s no shame in utilizing strength in numbers to mitigate your weaknesses—but partnering does more than that. It puts the project in front of the partner organization’s audience, instantly increasing the pool of potential participants or donors. In the age of instantaneous communication, partnering is almost a necessity. It serves the interests of the partnering organizations while providing

see **Partners**, page 3

What Do You Like About This Place?

By Willy Secrest, Co-Chair

“Everything!” my new friends responded, smiling with enthusiasm. Walking in our preserves several times each week, I run into lots of folks out in the woods, and I had met this couple at the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve. Often I pause for a chat with others walking on the trail. These are inevitably happy moments. Nature preserves are good medicine. They bring peace and joy into the world. I often think of them as “earth prayers.” They provide welcome pauses from the too often frantic turmoil of our contemporary lifestyles. Beyond the pavement and the rushing traffic,

see **This place**, page 7

A Look Inside

Birding at LeFurge Woods	2
Trail Repairs	3
Bird Center	4
Upcoming Events	4

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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Birding at LeFurge Woods

Superior Township: Michigan's Best-Kept Birding Secret

By Bill Sverdlik

In case you missed it, May 8 through May 17 was "the Biggest Week in American Birding." While technically longer than one week, the "Biggest Week" is an annual birdwatching festival centered in northwest Ohio, specifically around Maumee Bay Lodge, Magee Marsh and Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

The festival highlights and celebrates the annual spring avian migration north, which is in high gear during the festival. And what a celebration it is: an estimated 80,000 birdwatching enthusiasts flock (no pun intended) from all over the world to observe one of the great miracles of nature: the perilous bird migration north from as far away as South America to breeding grounds as far north as the Arctic circle, only to turn around a few short months later for the return trip before winter.

Featured prominently in "Biggest Week" advertising is the New World Warbler, the eye candy of North American birding. Composed of 53 species, warblers represent the most colorful, beautiful and melodious of all the North American avian families. Organizers of the "Biggest Week" proudly proclaim the Magee Marsh area as "Warbler Capital of the World" where "over 30 species of warblers congregate in the trees before crossing Lake Erie."

Superior Township is about 80 miles from Magee Marsh. Maybe birdwatching offers a similar experience. Let's see. LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve has recorded 31 species of warblers! Thus, we might consider our own campaign:

"LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve—As Many Warblers as the Warbler Capital of the World."

A little closer inspection of the data reveals more: LeFurge has recorded 31 distinct warbler species, Magee has recorded 39. The data was compiled from eBird, a well-known online database of bird sightings used by birders around the world. It appears these two sites are roughly comparable. For New World Sparrows, LeFurge listed 16 distinct species, while Magee had 18. For waterfowl, LeFurge had 26 species versus 22 for Magee. While the total species count for Magee Marsh is a bit higher than the totals for Superior Township preserves, we can see that these two areas offer a similar exposure.

see **Birding**, page 6



Partners, continued from pg. 1

connections among their respective supporters, who often have common interests.

I am personally neither a birder nor a gardener (my interests are hiking and land use), but by the halfway point of 2026 I have already represented SMLC and the Superior Township Chapter by tabling at the 2026 Spring Michigan Bluebird Festival (hosted by the Michigan Bluebird Society) and the Native Plant Expo & Marketplace (coordinated by the Washtenaw County Conservation District). [For those who may not be familiar with it, “tabling” refers to having a display table at a specific event, usually where there are several such tables.]

Both groups successfully broadened their reach this year by inviting environmental groups of various types to participate in this way. This enhanced the range of what the main event had to offer, making it “bigger.” At each event, there were several organizations that I am familiar with or belong to. We are aware of one another but rarely interface in person.

I have been a passive supporter (annual dues) of the Bird Center [now Bird Center of Michigan] for many years, but I have never brought them an injured bird or otherwise interfaced with a human there. It was only through casual chitchat at the Bluebird Festival that I learned that a sizable percentage of their releases back into the wild take place in Superior Township! This has a direct correlation to the work that SMLC and our partners do to protect natural areas and open agricultural space here. I asked them if they could author an article about this for our newsletter, and they graciously agreed (see *A Place where Birds Can Begin Again* on page 4).

At the other end of the spectrum, SMLC is one of the lead organizations in the Save Sibley Prairie Coalition (<https://savesibleyprairie.org>). The coalition needs to raise \$6 million by the end of the year to bare-bones save the prairie; \$9.7 million to make it sustainable. Few regional organizations have the capacity to meet such

Superior Township Chapter Update

STC Volunteers Reopen Storm-Damaged Trails

By Willy Secrest

Having arrived at the Secrest Nature Preserve’s small parking lot on Berry Road, 1/2 mile north of Ford Road, I sauntered down the winding path through the airy oak-hickory forest. About a half mile in, I sat on a comfy log, one of a half dozen sawed by our lead steward volunteer, George Kasdorf, and Superior Township Chapter Steering Committee volunteer, Bill Sverdlik. The stop allowed me to appreciate the astonishing forces and their consequences within the natural world—two mature oaks, blown down in the powerfully fierce winds of April 16th, had also knocked down smaller neighbors, rendering the trail impassable. Thanks to George and Bill’s lumbering skills, the trail was cleared, and this lovely new resting place affords us all the chance to contemplate and appreciate the loss of these two great oaks, as well as embrace the wild in our own backyard.



Trail Clearing Complete!

Photo by Willy Secrest

constraints on their own.

Partnering is more than merely networking. Who you know is important, but with partnering, everybody brings something to the table. A good partnership really is worth more than the sum of its parts.

Summer 2026

3

A Place Where Birds Can Begin Again

By Marissa Jardine and Maria Sines,
Bird Center of Michigan

At the Bird Center of Michigan, our mission is to aid birds, wildlife, and the environment through rehabilitation and public education. Every year, our small but dedicated team of staff, interns, and volunteers cares for over 2,000 injured and orphaned birds with one goal in mind: returning them to the wild where they belong.

That final step is just as important as the rehabilitation itself.

Michigan is a sacred place for songbirds, especially Southeast Michigan, where both the Mississippi and Atlantic flyways converge, a critical spot for migrating songbirds. As advocates for wildlife, it is our responsibility to conserve these spaces for future generations of songbirds.

Just northeast of our clinic, the preserves of Superior Township provide ideal release sites for many of our recovered patients. Before any bird is released, we carefully select a location that offers the food, shelter, and habitat needed

see **Bird Center**, page 7



Wildflowers in bloom on the trails

Photo by Jim McIntyre

Upcoming Events

Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy
in Superior Township

June 27 – August 24 7 Nature Preserves, 5 in Superior Twp.	Walk in Wonder (hike-a-thon) Conservancy Farm, LeFurge Woods, Jack R. Smiley, Lost Lake, Secrest, Sibley Prairie, Springhill (https://smlcland.org)
August 16 Sunday 1:15pm – 3:45pm	Midsummer Greenway Delight (walk) LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve Meet at Conservancy Farm (8383 Vreeland Rd., Superior Twp.)
August 30 Sunday 12:00pm – 3:00pm	Walk in Wonder Celebration (fundraiser - gathering) Conservancy Farm (8383 Vreeland Rd., Superior Twp.)
September 26 Saturday 7:00pm – 10:00pm	Full Moon Campfire (gathering) Conservancy Farm (8383 Vreeland Rd., Superior Twp.)
October 18 Sunday 1:15pm – 3:45pm	Autumn Spectacular (walk) Location TBD Superior Township
October 24 Saturday 7:00pm – 10:00pm	Full Moon Campfire (gathering) Conservancy Farm (8383 Vreeland Rd., Superior Twp.)

SMLC's Walk in Wonder

It's not too late to support SMLC's summer fundraiser, a hike-a-thon exploring its beautiful preserves and trails!

Although the walking ends August 24, a minimum donation of \$45 will still get you an invitation to the celebratory finale at the Conservancy Farm.

- Join with event hikers, donors and attendees for one final celebratory hike in the heart of the Superior Greenway.
- Help honor SMLC partners and volunteers during the biennial awards presentation.
- Enjoy a picnic lunch and camaraderie in an idyllic rural setting.

August 30, 2026 from 12 pm - 3:00 pm at the Conservancy Farm,
8383 Vreeland Road, Superior Township

Please go to smlcland.org for registration and donation information.



Preserve Watcher Reports

By Willy Secrest

Superior Township Chapter Steering Committee members are serving as Preserve Watchers at Superior Township landscapes protected by your local Land Trust (SMLC). As such, we visit our designated preserves regularly to assess trail conditions, monitor potential ecological threats such as invasive species, erosion, etc., report violations of preserve rules, and share interesting natural observations with Stewardship & Outreach Specialist, Alan McTaggart.

Below are brief descriptions of two of our local SMLC Preserves:

Conservancy Farm

Watcher: Hannah Briggs

The Conservancy Farm property is hidden, in part, by a gorgeous, historic, brick Victorian home that houses SMLC's operations. If you venture past the welcome foundations of the house, though, you'll find a well-worn trail

through the meadow that leads to a sprawling field of farm plots and wild grasses. Each summer, you can view grasshopper sparrows, Savannah sparrows, bobolinks, sandhill cranes, and many other grassland birds that aren't readily available in other parks and preserves. If you've never explored the Conservancy Farm property, I'd urge you to expand your horizons here.

Springhill Nature Preserve

Watcher: Theo Poling

The term "hidden gem" may be overused for local sights and experiences, but for Springhill, the term is beyond apt. Set back from a road pouring with naturalistic beauty as oaks curl their boughs over the well-pressed dirt, Springhill is something that must be discovered. Venturing past the grassy meadow that opens onto Berry Road, you'll find a mature forest rife with glacial valleys, shell-like mushrooms, and singing vireos, whose calls echo across the quiet forest floor. If you haven't been to Springhill yet, I urge you to plan your trip.

Message from SMLC

by Jim McIntyre, SMLC President

Every year, I'm reminded that conservation is ultimately about people. While protecting land is at the heart of SMLC's mission, none of that work happens without the generosity, dedication, and passion of the communities we serve. As I reflect on the past year, my overwhelming feeling is one of gratitude.

Thanks to the support of our members, volunteers, partners, and donors, SMLC has continued to make meaningful progress. We completed a new Strategic Plan that will guide our work for years to come, expanded community engagement through initiatives like Walk in Wonder, advanced important land protection efforts, and welcomed volunteers from across our communities to our preserves for stewardship projects and educational events. Every trail maintained, every invasive species

removed, every new supporter welcomed, and every acre protected is the result of people choosing to invest in the place they call home.

In a world where it's easy to focus on challenges beyond our reach, SMLC continues to demonstrate that lasting conservation begins locally. It starts with a volunteer who shows up on a Saturday morning, a donor who believes future generations deserve clean water and healthy forests, or a family discovering one of our preserves for the very first time. These may seem like small acts, but together they create a lasting impact across southeast Michigan.

To everyone who has supported SMLC this past year, thank you. Your commitment has strengthened not only our organization, but also the natural places that make Superior Township such a remarkable community. I look forward to everything we'll accomplish together in the year ahead.

Birding, continued from pg. 2

Ah, but what are the benefits of Superior Birding? I've never had to look for a parking spot at Conservancy Farm! Nor has anyone at LeFurge Woods forbidden me from using a tripod with my spotting scope (tripods are forbidden at Magee due to crowds). When I bird Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve or BirdSong Nature Preserve [Superior Township owned], I often have the entire place to myself. The gentle gurgle of a Bobolink along with a slight breeze is birding at its best. At Magee, one must navigate the crowds, the chorus of "What is that bird?" and the folks arguing about which camera is better, Nikon or Canon. I truly appreciate the crowds at Magee; it means more people are becoming attuned to birds and the environment. This is good for all of us. But where is the experience more fulfilling, more fun, more spiritual? Superior Township every time.

Don't take my word for it. I spoke with three Superior Township birders who between them have logged many hours on these trails "north of Geddes." Donna Parmelee is quick to point out something that often gets overlooked in all the migration excitement: the birding here is excellent year-round, not just during the spring spectacle. While the rest of the world is descending on Magee Marsh in May, Donna is out on the local trails in winter months finding birds that would surprise even seasoned enthusiasts. Karl Brenner adds another dimension that no festival can manufacture: the accumulated knowledge of local birders. Birders have been visiting these preserves for years, and that collective wisdom—which tree the Eastern Screech Owl favors, which hedgerow the sparrows prefer on a cold morning—is quietly passed along on the trail. That kind of institutional memory is worth more than any festival guide. Bill Nolting observes that, "Superior Township is environmentally rich," and to get the same species diversity elsewhere would require hours of driving.

All three agree that Superior Township always offers the chance for the rare, serendipitous sighting: Bill and Donna once spotted a Mississippi Kite at Cherry Hill Nature Preserve (yes, as the name indicates, this is not a bird typically seen this far north). A favorite spot of many local birders (me included) is the intersection of Vreeland and Gotfredson Roads. Snowy Owls and Rough Legged Hawks can be spotted there in the winter. The fields along these roads also host the classic winter

see **Birding**, page 8



Bluebird boxes offer shelter for nesting songbirds

Photo by Charles Scott



This place, continued from pg. 1

a timeless world unfolds where the ancient rhythms of nature maintain the steady pulse of life that's been beating since time immemorial.

Our local Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy was born almost 40 years ago, sprung from the heartfelt passion of our founder, Jack Smiley. Jack had been the Executive Director of the Detroit Audubon Society. Seeing that the natural habitat of his feathered friends was decreasing, he went to work. The project began small around kitchen tables, but it was an idea whose time had come. Like-minded souls joined up with Jack, word spread, and little by little funding was raised and properties acquired.

SMLC is a "conservancy." The word derives from the Latin, "conservare," meaning to preserve, keep intact, or guard. The ancient Indo-European root, "ser," means to protect. So here we are, from kitchen tables to now. This is what we're all about! SMLC strives to preserve, or keep intact and protect, open space, natural land, and wildlife habitat.

Typically, so-called "vacant lands" for sale are anything but vacant. They are teeming with life, and as the relatively new science of ecology is demonstrating, "everything is connected to everything else." As our global civilization has been trading off the natural world for human purposes, it is now abundantly clear that a shift in our priorities is at hand. "A change is gonna come," and it's happening right here and now as we "think globally and act locally."

Since you are reading this in our newsletter, you most likely share our concerns. This summer SMLC is hosting Walk in Wonder, a fundraising hike-a-thon that is also an invitation to spread the word as we gather like-minded souls to celebrate and protect our natural world. Whether you join us in person as we walk the trails, or offer some financial support to those who do venture out, a measure of peace and joy is guaranteed! Learn more about the how to participate elsewhere in this issue.

Bird Center, continued from pg. 4

for its species, along with nearby populations of others of the same kind. These protected natural areas give rehabilitated birds the best possible chance to survive and thrive.

By virtue of their stewardship of these preserves, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy and its Superior Township Chapter have become invaluable partners in that effort. LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve in particular has welcomed many of our patients back into the wild, including American Woodcocks, Downy Woodpeckers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and recently two juvenile Song Sparrows that completed their rehabilitation at the Bird Center.

Every successful release is a reminder that wildlife rehabilitation and land conservation work together. Caring for an injured bird is only part of the journey. The rest depends on healthy, protected places where life can begin again. We are grateful for SMLC and its Superior Township Chapter's commitment to preserving these landscapes and ensuring that birds continue to find safe refuge for generations to come.



**Preparing to re-home
juvenile Song Sparrows**

Photo by Dora Cassar

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

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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.*

Birding, continued from pg. 6

flock: Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs and Horned Larks drifting across the frozen landscape like feathered snowflakes. It is, in a word, spectacular. And you won't be fighting anyone for a parking spot.

So make the trip to Magee Marsh next May. It is a worthy pilgrimage and a genuine wonder. But when you get home, take a walk through LeFurge, or Smiley, or BirdSong, or out along Vreeland Road on a crisp December morning. You may just find that the Warbler Capital of the World has some serious competition—and it's right in our backyard.

Get Email Updates from SMLC

Don't miss out on the latest Conservancy news, events, and announcements.

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



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