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Looking ahead at Willow Creek Preserve



High school and grade school students join volunteers to plant 150 trees, learn about wildlife, and celebrate the restoration of Willow Creek on Arbor Day



By Sophia Gosetti, Willow Creek Preserve Project Manager

AN URBAN OASIS, Willow Creek Preserve, spans 143 acres at the edge of the City of Sheboygan. With hills of the old oxbow of the Sheboygan River sloping into the heart of the preserve, it is easy to let go of the bustling city above. Birds soar overhead as mammals scurry through the understory and plants bristle in the wind. I am still struck with awe whenever I visit; there is incredible biodiversity and so much to explore.

Willow Creek is the focal point of this preserve, giving it its name and many of its unique features. One mile of the creek twists through the preserve, providing riparian habitat to aquatic and terrestrial species. Just a few months ago, GLC removed two culverts that had been blocking fish passage, opening miles of aquatic habitat.

As part of the culvert removal project, GLC planned to revegetate the areas affected by the construction by planting native tree and shrub species in the immediate vicinity of those areas. GLC's recent Arbor Day Celebration and Volunteer Event is a testament to the community dedication

surrounding Willow Creek Preserve. More than twenty volunteers, plus one class from North High School and two classes of 4th grade students from Pigeon River Elementary School joined GLC to plant 150 trees, learn about wildlife and biodiversity, and celebrate the recent restoration and the bright future of Willow Creek Preserve. Reflecting on the event, Pigeon River Elementary School teacher Sara told me, "The kids are still talking about their experience, and I'm sure they'll have lots of stories to tell their families!.... It was perfect." The event included tree planting, a guided hike by GLC's volunteer naturalist David Kuckuk, poetry reading by City of Sheboygan Mayor Sorenson, and overall enjoyment of the beauty of Willow Creek Preserve.

GLC hopes to host more events like our Arbor Day Celebration and Volunteer Event by including our community in current and future restoration projects. We are currently working on developing a detailed

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and comprehensive land management plan for the entire property, setting goals and outlining the priorities and projects GLC will work towards in the coming years. Preliminarily, our major priorities for restoration projects are stormwater management, invasive species management, restoring fallow agricultural fields to natural wetlands and grasslands, and wildlife monitoring. GLC's goals for Willow Creek Preserve are to restore it to a natural sanctuary for both wildlife and our community, where people can gather to learn and find peace with nature.

Cataloging plant and animal communities is vital to the management and preservation of Willow Creek Preserve and is a fun and exciting way to involve our community in ongoing projects. In 2021, GLC observed six species of bats, four species of frog and toad, and many bird and small mammal species. In 2022, we will be recording observations of bats, birds, amphibians, turtles, snakes, small mammals, and more. Please email Sophia for more information or to get involved at sophia@glaciallakes.org.

We are thrilled to continue our mission of preserving and protecting land and water resources for future generations at this beloved preserve through restoration, biodiversity monitoring, and community involvement. Stay tuned or visit our website at www.glaciallakes.org for volunteer opportunities and other fun events at Willow Creek Preserve!



Volunteer Story: Pete Pittner

BEING RELATIVELY NEW to GLC, many of you may not know me. I have been involved with several other environmentally focused organizations over the years and was aware of GLC, but until recently, never took the time to become involved with this organization. Now that I'm here, my passion for the mission of land trusts has only continued to grow.

There were many reasons for me to get involved with GLC. As someone from a family that hunted, fished, and camped, I spent much of my time growing up in the outdoors. This led to college degrees in the environmental sciences and a career that allowed me to focus on environmental restoration and land management. Much as my parents did, our family spent vacations hiking, camping, canoeing, fishing, and exploring. We continue these traditions to this day with our grown children and now grandchildren.

The mission of GLC to "permanently preserve and protect land and water resources for future generations" is an easy mantra to support for someone with a love of the outdoors. But it is the actual meaning and accumulated results of these actions that drive the true passion and provides the motivation to volunteer for GLC.

First and foremost, lands that are protected by a conservation easement are protected into perpetuity. That means that even with continued development pressure and the ever-increasing economic value of open lands, these properties will forever remain in a natural state. That alone should be reason enough to support the mission, but

Welcome Sophie Gosetti

Not only is GLC growing our volunteer and community engagement base, but GLC is overjoyed to announce Sophie Gosetti is now a full-time employee! She is excited to be more involved with GLC, dive deeper into Willow Creek Preserve, and learn more about our land trust and our community. We cannot do this without the support of our donors and volunteers- thank you!



Pete Pittner, VP of the Board of Directors for GLC, with a snapping turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*.

when looking at the "ancillary benefits" of preservation, the case for protection becomes even more apparent. These lands provide valuable wildlife habitat, allow for a diversity of plant species, protect wetland areas, and allow for groundwater recharge. Both forested and grassland areas act as carbon sinks in the fight against climate change and work to protect the air we breathe. All of these provide economic value, whether through recreation, decreases in infrastructure costs due to decreased flooding and runoff or cleaner surface and ground water to name a few. In addition to all of this, an abundance of research has shown that the access to green space is vital in improving both physical and mental health!

The benefits of land conservation are many and I have found more than enough opportunities to help in advancing the mission GLC. Volunteering has afforded the opportunity to work on a cause that I believe in, with good people who get things done. As an individual, it allows me to explore and work on beautiful properties that I would never have experienced on my own. As a father and grandfather, I know that I am working to preserve and improve lands for future generations. And as a member of society, I know that the mission of GLC is improving the social, economic, and physical health of our communities. Truly a win, win, win for all of us!

Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, Fond du Lac County

A new conservation easement of 237 acres



The Sisters of St. Agnes have worked with GLC to create a conservation easement on 237 acres, land which was inhabited by indigenous people more than 10,000 years ago.

By Abbey Vizelka
Land Project Manager

GLACIAL LAKES CONSERVANCY started the year 2022 by completing a conservation easement with the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes (CSA) to preserve their nearly 237-acre property in Fond du Lac County after an 18-month process. The Congregation has a long history of valuing land and water resources starting when Father Caspar Rehr first passed through the ledge east of Fond du Lac in the 1850s. He found seven freshwater springs tumbling down its expanse that quenched his thirst, wishing that the Sisters of St. Agnes might someday live on this beautiful land. That land became CSA's St. Joseph Springs Farm, and in 2002, the Congregation opened their current motherhouse on the land.

For over 150 years, the Sisters have tended to this land through farming and gardening, protecting and preserving the woodlands, springs and streams, the Niagara Escarpment, native wildflowers, plants, and wildlife, and installing solar panels that generate clean energy. The entire St. Agnes Convent and the on-site maintenance building are now 100%

powered by the sun with their 880 solar panel installation near the motherhouse and their 2020 purchase of 538 solar panels on Alliant Energy's off-site solar garden.

The Sisters feel a sense of responsibility for protecting these lands once inhabited by indigenous populations for more than 10,000 years. Artifacts from those times have been found all along the Niagara Escarpment, and the CSA property is no exception, with them finding evidence of a pre-19th-century longhouse built for multiple families. It's so wonderful for GLC to be working with landowners who recognize the importance of the land's rich history tens of thousands of years before them.

The CSA property includes 340 feet of the Niagara Escarpment, a unique glacial formation that runs from New York state into Illinois. It is designated a Statewide Critical Natural Resource priority study area by the Natural Heritage Conservation Program and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The dolomite outcroppings offer unique habitat communities for uncommon vegetation and wildlife species that are only found along the escarpment. Four native red

cedars, the only conifer native to the escarpment, were noted during a land survey of the property conducted 22 years ago.

A planted prairie on the eastern half of the property contains four retreat hermitages intended for those seeking God within and pursuing the comfort, stillness, solitude, and quiet that can only be found amidst nature. Visitors can walk on the trails through the grasses and forbs and head west, where the Sisters have planted a variety of trees along the top of the escarpment. It's relaxing to walk through these areas listening to an array of resident birds calling to each other.

The conservation easement includes 112 acres of agricultural land for row cropping that CSA leases for sustainable agriculture. This easement ensures that the farmer implements best management practices through programs of the NRCS that minimize chemical inputs and soil erosion.

GLC is grateful to be working with landowners such as the CSA to preserve and protect land and water resources for future generations. Sister Jean Steffes, general superior of the Congregation, said of this partnership with GLC, "Through this commitment, we are living out the Care for Earth: Home of All Living Creatures corporate stance as well as our membership in the Laudato Si' Action Platform."



Biodiversity on the Preserves

Life in a Shell

By Gary Casper, Biologist

BIODIVERSITY is the variety of life on Earth. The air you breathe, the water you drink and the food you eat all rely upon biodiversity. The diversity of life on Earth is mind-boggling, with likely up to 100 million species. Yet biodiversity is in crisis, with as many as one million species now at risk of extinction. The Glacial Lakes Conservancy Biodiversity Blog will celebrate our biodiversity, showcasing real data from our preserves to inform our membership about the diversity of life we are helping to preserve. Love life!

BLOG 2: LIFE IN A SHELL

I stole that title from the book by Donald C. Jackson. He wondered how something so awkward as a turtle survived in this world. Me too. When I first started radio tracking turtles in the 1990s I discovered a secret window into their lives; technology that allowed me to find them whenever I wanted, often with them unawares. What did I learn from spying on turtles? Lots, but the most amazing part was what they did in winter.

Last year GLC Director Jennifer Rutten and Vice President Peter Pittner discovered Blanding's Turtles at Willow

Creek Preserve. Blanding's Turtles are declining throughout their range, which is centered on the Great Lakes region. They age well, having kids when about 13 years old and living to 70 or more, much like us. But they walk around in a shell, and have larger litters the older they get; imagine grandma pushing out quintuplets at 70!

Last year we formed Team Turtle, a wonderful volunteer core who trapped three Blanding's Turtles and has been radio tracking them for the past year, learning their secret ways. As I write this the turtles are trapped under ice. If they freeze, they die, but they can survive three months under the ice without breathing air, in mucky water with very little oxygen. How do they do it? It turns out they breathe through their butts (some oxygen is absorbed through the lining), and reduce their metabolism to a bare minimum while their body temperature hovers around 35 degrees under the ice.

When I first started radio tracking turtles, I expected them to find the deepest, warmest, most oxygen flush spot to over winter. Nope! They would



An opossum peeks out between the branches

settle in near shore, or burrow under sedge hummocks. Come spring I realized why. They had chosen the sunniest spots as these were the first spots to thaw in spring. Year after year I tracked turtles to the exact same spot in winter, even if they had walked a half mile away over the summer, they always came back.

Spring is a painful time for a turtle. As they awaken and restart their metabolism, there is an oxygen debt to pay. Lactate has built up in their tissues and muscles aren't responding well. It is similar to when we exercise too hard and our muscles cramp up. In early spring, you may see lethargic turtles basking in the sun, trying to re-oxygenate their cramped muscles. In a few days they will fully recover. These turtles are smart and know their neighborhood. Team Turtle will be mapping their favorite haunts at the Willow Creek Preserve in 2022, hopefully find their nesting sites, and these critical habitats will be incorporated into the land management plan. We'll have more stories about life in a shell as we probe further into the secret lives of our turtles.



(Left) GLC staff and volunteers, known as Team Turtle, trapping Blanding's Turtles for research at Willow Creek Preserve

iNaturalist

A useful citizen-science platform

By Jack Coulter
GLC Intern

EACH OF THE PROPERTIES in Glacial Lakes Conservancy's (GLC) portfolio has different habitats that support various species. GLC staff and volunteers are interested in gaining a broader understanding of the different types of plants and animals that can be found on our preserves and conservation easements so that we can make informed decisions on how to best manage our properties and support easement landowners. One of the tools used to record and catalog the various species found on the properties is a citizen-science platform called iNaturalist.

iNaturalist is a joint initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society, founded in 2008. Its primary goal is to help connect people with nature by giving citizen scientists a platform to share their sightings. Conservationists and land managers can also use the data collected on the site to inform decision-making and track long-term trends in the presence or absence of a given species. One of the iNaturalist platform features that facilitates this is the ability to create specific "projects" designed to collect detailed data about a particular species or place.

GLC has several projects that we use to help organize the data at our preserves. We have or are working on general biodiversity projects at each preserve. We also have projects that focus on specific species guilds, like birds or amphibians, that allow us to collect more granular information about the biodiversity on the properties, like exact locations, age/life-stage, sex, etc. We're excited to share the results of our data collection efforts soon. We hope you'll consider reporting your sightings to iNaturalist the next time you visit one of our properties!



Glacial Lakes Conservancy invites you to: **On the Conservation Trail!**

Annual Dinner FUNdraiser 2022

Saturday, June 11th, 4- 8 p.m.

Camp Evelyn in Plymouth, Sheboygan County

Join us on the beautiful trails at Camp Evelyn for an evening filled with fun, good food, cash bar, and music. We'll offer a guided hike, activities, and opportunities to learn about conservation including a presentation on ecosystem restoration by Jim Snitgen of the Oneida Nation. After two years of virtual annual events for GLC, we are excited to have you join us, *in person*, on the conservation trail!

Schedule: Saturday, June 11th, 2022

4 p.m. Music by Tom Sugars, acoustic guitarist

Appetizers and cash bar

Local Plein Air artists at work on the Camp property - enjoy!

4:30 p.m. Welcome Jennifer Rutten, GLC Executive Director;

Cynthia Northup, GLC Board President; Hope Spies, Director of Camp and Program, Girl Scouts of Manitou Council

4:30 - 6 p.m. Dinner catered by Traders Caters.

5:15 p.m. Speaker Jim Snitgen

6:00 p.m. Music by Tom Sugars, Dessert and s'mores

6:30 p.m. Optional hike led by naturalist David Kuckuk or stay around the bonfire for conversation and activities.

Tickets are \$110 per person

Please RSVP by May 28 by purchasing tickets online at www.glaciallakes.org

Take only memories, leave nothing but footprints.

– Chief Seattle

Our Online Auction runs June 4 - 12 at 6 p.m. It is open to all. Bid on unique and local auction items. www.glaciallakes.org. Check our website for instructions and a growing list of dinner and auction sponsors.



A couple of the exciting online auction items - A turtle cutting board made by Dr. Cole Northup and a Green Bay Packer football signed by 2021 coaches and players!

GLACIAL LAKES



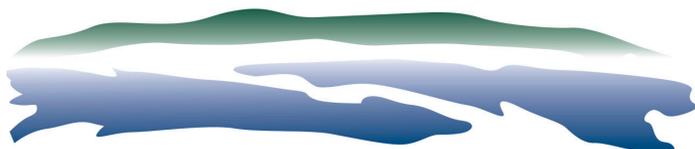
CONSERVANCY

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Glacial Lakes Conservancy is a private, nonprofit land trust that provides enduring solutions for land conservation in Wisconsin's Lake Michigan Basin and serves Sheboygan, Manitowoc, Calumet, Kewaunee, and Fond du Lac Counties. Contributions to further our efforts are appreciated.

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GLACIAL LAKES



CONSERVANCY

Board News

The Board Development Committee is studying current skills on the Board and is seeking additional individuals who are passionate about conservation and nature.

For information please contact Jennifer at
info@glaciallakes.org
Jennifer Rutten, Executive Director

Special thanks to those who helped with the content and editing of this issue of **Landscapes**:

Dr. Gary Casper	Jennifer Born Rutten
Jack Coulter	Martha Schott
Sophia Gosetti	Abbey Vizek
Pete Pittner	Jessica Wiegand

Upcoming GLC Events:

Sat. June 4th 8 a.m.

Spring Migratory Bird Hike with Moraine Shores Audubon at Willow Creek Preserve

Join GLC and Moraine Shores Audubon (formerly Sheboygan County Audubon Society) at 8 a.m. for a spring migration bird hike through Willow Creek Preserve. Hopefully, we will be able to observe bird species never before documented on the preserve! All birding levels are welcome to enjoy! Email jennifer@glaciallakes.org to RSVP for this event.

Sun. August 7th Pollinator Walk 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

Pollinator walk held at GLC private Conservation Easement Bella Terra. Join Milwaukee pollinator experts Brooke Gille and Jennifer Lazewski on a hike and learning adventure! Hoping we identify more federally protected and endangered Rusty Patched Bumblebees! Email jennifer@glaciallakes.org to reserve your spot today! Land Trust Days event \$10 non-member. **FREE to GLC members**