



THE SPROUT

NICHES LAND TRUST | SPRING 2020 | VOLUME 24 ISSUE 2

Confronting Coronavirus | The Carroll County Poetry Project | 500+ Acre Preserve

*"Let there be spaces in your togetherness, and let the winds of the heavens
dance between you." - Kahlil Gibran*

It Takes a Village

On Saturday, February 15th, NICHES friends, supporters, and staff gathered at the Ross Hills Camp in West Lafayette for our annual meeting to celebrate 25 years of local land conservation! After an organizational update by Executive Director Gus Nyberg, attendees were taken on a journey back in time to the very beginnings of NICHES through the words and stories of the founding mothers and fathers themselves. Starting in 1995, as a completely volunteer led organization, NICHES has steadily grown over the last quarter century to be one of the central players restoring native ecosystems in this region of the state.

It's exciting to see how far we have been able to come in such a short period of time (ecologically speaking), but we know it couldn't have been possible without a community that is engaged and invested in the goal of protecting our natural heritage. Volunteers are still a critical component of the work we do as an organization. If you haven't already, we encourage you to make it out to one of our volunteer workdays and help lend a hand in our stewardship efforts. Membership fees go directly into protecting, rehabilitating, and sharing our local natural areas and, if you aren't at present, we encourage you to become a member of the organization (2020 has a special reduced membership rate of only \$25!). If you are a property owner within our service range who wants to play a role in ensuring that high quality local habitats will continue to exist into perpetuity, we encourage you to reach out to us to discuss the planning of your estate.

Land is the literal foundation of the world we live in; it sustains us physically and spiritually and it is the canvas that nature paints many broad and connecting strokes. It takes a village to mend and sustain it, so please join the NICHES family and be an engaged supporter of our next 25 years of growth!

(NICHES Executive Director Gus Nyberg: Pictured at the 2020 annual meeting & Sprout Cover by Chad Phelps)



Executive Director Update

“As currently unfolding world events cause disruptions in all of our lives, we ask our NICHES family to stay safe, be patient, and remain hopeful. Like so many other organizations that rely on a community of supporters, we are feeling the full effect of this pandemic. Our seven week partnership with a 9 person team of Americorps volunteers that would have provided over 2,500 volunteer hours for the organization was cut short to just one week. Our fire season was reduced to only 4 burns, although we were able to get a 198 acre burn in at Black Rock. And, NICHES’ calendar looks like it was scratched up by a flock of hungry chickens that just found a bed of beetle grubs.

The Governor’s stay at home order has reinforced for me the importance of my connections to family, friends, and the natural world. NICHES’ lands and waters are vital places in our community to make those connections by providing pleasure for those seeking sightings of native plant and wildlife species, places to put your boat into the water, places to put your boots on and hit the trails, places to take your boots off and sink your toes into the mud, places to clear your head and center yourself, places to feel the cool of bedrock in the summer, and places to pick morels, black raspberries and pawpaws.

No one knows exactly what the future holds for any of us, but we do know our community is better for having quality natural areas which are free and open for the public to access and enjoy. Ultimately it is the natural world that we all live in and we all must play a role in its restoration, protection, and advocacy.”

-NICHES Executive Director,
Gus Nyberg



Confronting Coronavirus

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the first half of this year has put communities across the globe to the test. NICHES is taking every step necessary to ensure we are playing our part in the collaborative response to the worldwide pandemic. In order to slow the spread of the virus and prevent medical facilities from becoming over inundated, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) is recommending individuals stay quarantined at home and avoid all social gatherings. To adhere to these guidelines, NICHES has made the following changes to our upcoming public event calendar and all volunteer workdays will be canceled until further notice.

Rescheduled (New Dates TBD)

- Berkshire Tarnowski Poetry Hike (Original Date: March 27th)
- Jonathan Waterman Event (Original Date: April 25th)

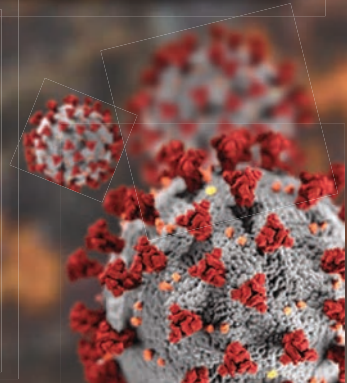
Pending

- Amphibian Exploration at Wabash Bottoms (April 24th 7:30 – 9pm)
- Bluebells in Bloom with Bob Easter (April 29th 1-3pm)
- Garlic Mustard Pesto Making at Moyer Gould (May 2nd 12-2pm)
- Birds and Bloom Hike at Moyer Gould (May 9th 9am – 1pm)

Canceled

- Hike and Stewardship Discussion of Birdfoot Barrens (Apr. 11th)

NICHES is actively monitoring the situation and will update the public about further event cancelations and reschedule dates through our paper and electronic newsletters as well as through social media. Thank you for your patience during this difficult time. We propose that you use this unprecedented event of social distancing to take a step into nature and contemplate how you can better the world we live in once our community can safely come back together. What can you do to share, celebrate, and restore our local environmental sanctuaries?



AmeriCorps NCCC

In early March, NICHES had the opportunity and privilege to spend a week working with a crew of AmeriCorps NCCC members. While the volunteers learned stewardship and ecological restoration techniques from our stewardship staff, they in turn donated their time and talents to help the organization make significant progress towards multiple projects across our service area. The projects ranged from hand seeding 16 acres of our recent Shawnee Bottoms wetland restoration to removing a half mile of dilapidated fence at Fisher Oak Savanna. The volunteers also helped clean up multiple trash dump sites on several nature preserves (Shawnee Bottoms trash removal pictured below). Unfortunately, our originally intended 7 week collaboration with the 9 member team was cut short due to the emerging threat of the COVID-19 virus. We want to humbly thank the team for their hard work, respect, and enthusiasm while working with us to enhance our local greenspaces.



AmeriCorps NCCC is a team-based service learning program where members between the ages of 18-24 work to strengthen communities and develop leadership skills while acquiring a broad array of skillsets from various occupations.

Before



After



The Carroll County Poetry Project

Samuel Love is a social and civic practice artist based in Gary, Indiana who organizes public projects that connect communities to their cultural histories through publishing, multi-media installations, and performance. Sam contacted NICHES while doing research for the Carroll County Poetry Project. The “Poetry Project” engages communities that have a demonstrated history of inspiring verse and nurturing poets. The goal of the project is to uncover and celebrate the poetic history of the county while also adding new verse through a series of community poetry writing events. Sam researches old newspapers and books to find poems about the communities he works in. These are presented through a series of writing workshops at local public libraries. He also installs poetry “dropboxes” with prompt cards to collect individual lines that get pieced together as a group-written poem about the community.

Sam states “I started the project in Gary in 2017, thanks to the support of the Legacy Foundation of Lake County, Indiana. In 2018, with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts, I conducted the project in Lockport, Illinois, an old canal town southwest of Chicago. In 2019, NICHES invited me to join their annual Wildcat Creek Voyage of Discovery, to lead poetry writing sessions about our experience on the water during our evening camps. It was truly a life altering event. One of our camps was at the Sixbey preserve, near Pyrmont and lands farmed by ancestors of mine in the 1830s. From there I set out to organize poetry hikes at all of the public NICHES preserves in Carroll County. We’ll be publishing these poems online and in a small chapbook after the project concludes this summer. The Carroll County Poetry Project is supported by the Indiana Arts Commission. I invite you to make it out to one of the upcoming poetry project events and help celebrate and contribute to poetic legacy of Carroll County.”

For more information about the Carroll County Poetry Project, contact me at samuelalove219@gmail.com.

On November 24th, 2019
NICHES Staff and friends gathered above the banks of Deer Creek at our Whistler Woods Preserve near Delphi for a poetry hike and worked together to add their own composition (featured right) to the counties poetic history.

*“Water springing drip by drip
over shale stair stepped with mossy runs
to ruffling streams
the tuffa residual coming down from the ravine
and the oak tree leaves still holding onto the limbs
as we hold on to the creek’s edge
life and death
signs around us
signs to remember
Charles’ gift of knowledge and land
Forever protecting trees, flower, and experience
to look beyond our fears of society and nature
and come together with the wilderness essence
centered
this is water
all is water”*

Upcoming Events:

1. *Frogs Glory Poetry Hike (April 21st: 5pm)*

2. *Full Moon Poetry Float (June 5-6)*

Join NICHES friends and staff for a overnight float, camp, and group poetry writing exercise on Wildcat Creek! For more information and to register email sam@nicheslandtrust.org

3. *NICHES 2020 Voyage of Discovery (July 13-15)*



“Many of the preserves in Carroll County are adjacent to lands farmed by my European ancestors who were among the first settlers in the county. I’m grateful for the work NICHES does to preserve and restore the natural ecosystem in this corner of Indiana and for the opportunity to catch a glimpse of what my ancestors, and those who called this land home before them, might have seen.”

- Hoosier writer, Sam Love





Photo from the 2019 Voyage of
Discovery by Nicholas Benner

Finding Room to Expand

Since NICHES' humble beginnings 25 years ago, we have grown significantly with the passion of dedicated staff, volunteers, and partners to become a model for conservation and stewardship in Indiana. In the early years, stewardship work was completed by volunteers and any equipment the organization had was stored with them. As we added paid staff and increased our work on the ground, soon we had a small tractor and an ATV to help with projects, but with the NICHES office located in the Life Building in downtown Lafayette, there was still no indoor storage for equipment. So, chainsaws, backpacks, brushcutters, herbicide and the like were stored in staff and volunteer sheds or garages. The tractor and ATV were stored outdoors, under a tarp in winter with the trailers parked in our Stewardship Director's driveway.

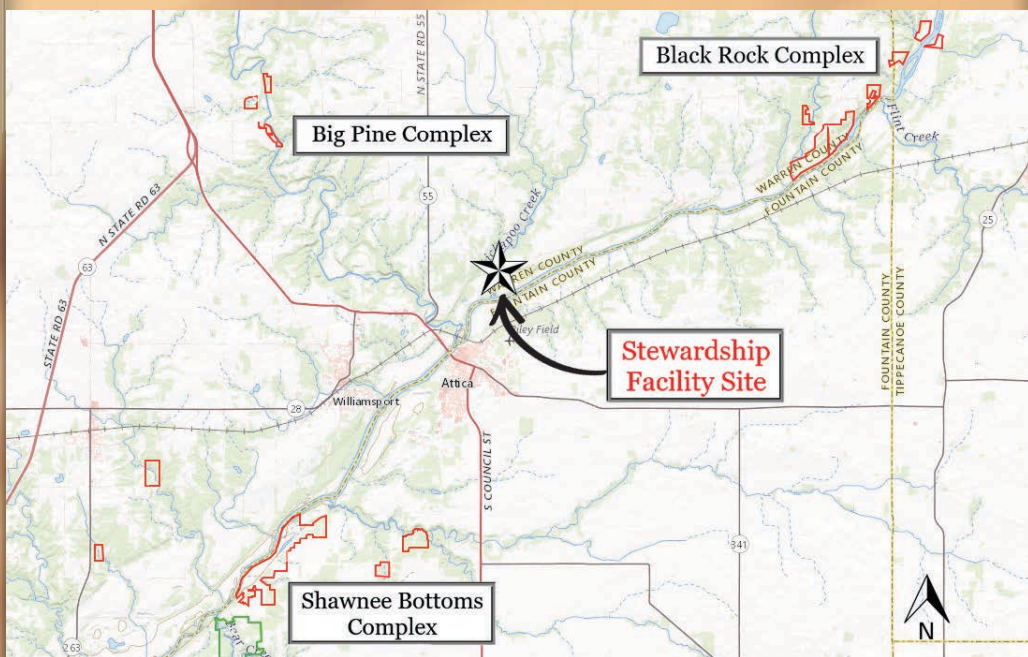
NICHES merged with the Clegg Foundation in 2014 and moved our office to Clegg Memorial Garden. This was a big step up from our tiny downtown office and it did provide some storage space, but things were still not ideal. The shed at Clegg had a dirt floor and was fairly open to the elements and intrusion by animals. As we came into 2015, we added a second steward along with an expansion of fire gear and a second ATV, a walk behind mower, and more herbicide supplies. Around this time seed collection, drying, cleaning, and storing increased with the added projects, but still no new space.

In the summer of 2017, with personal space being overtaken by NICHES equipment, we finally got some indoor space rented from Arbor America large enough to store our herbicide supplies and keep the stewardship vehicles indoors with room to park the trailers outdoors. (Pictured Below)



This was a good step, but still not enough. Real indoor workspace for organized equipment storage, repairs, and maintenance, as well as a place to dry and store seed and grow plants was needed. We require a facility which reflects the quality of our stewardship program and we are happy to say, after years of personal sacrifice by staff and volunteers, we are on our way to accomplishing that goal!

In late 2019, the Roy Whistler Foundation stepped up to offer funding for the purchase of a 31 acre property which will serve as our stewardship base into the future. The property is centrally located within 10 miles of NICHES core focus areas and includes a small portion of Kickapoo Creek.



As an added bonus, two NICHES members have included a neighboring property in their estate plan, which will eventually lead to the stewardship facility being located on an 80+ acre property with beautiful natural features. Also included with the property are seventeen acres in agricultural production which will generate some income as the facility is being built and will eventually provide space for restoration and establishment of native nursery beds for local ecotype seed production.

NICHES plans to double the acres which we impact through stewardship over the next 10 years, which will require 4-5 full time stewards to accomplish. The time has come to put foundations under our 'castles in the sky' to ensure that the high standards of our stewardship program will have continuity and staying power for generations to come.

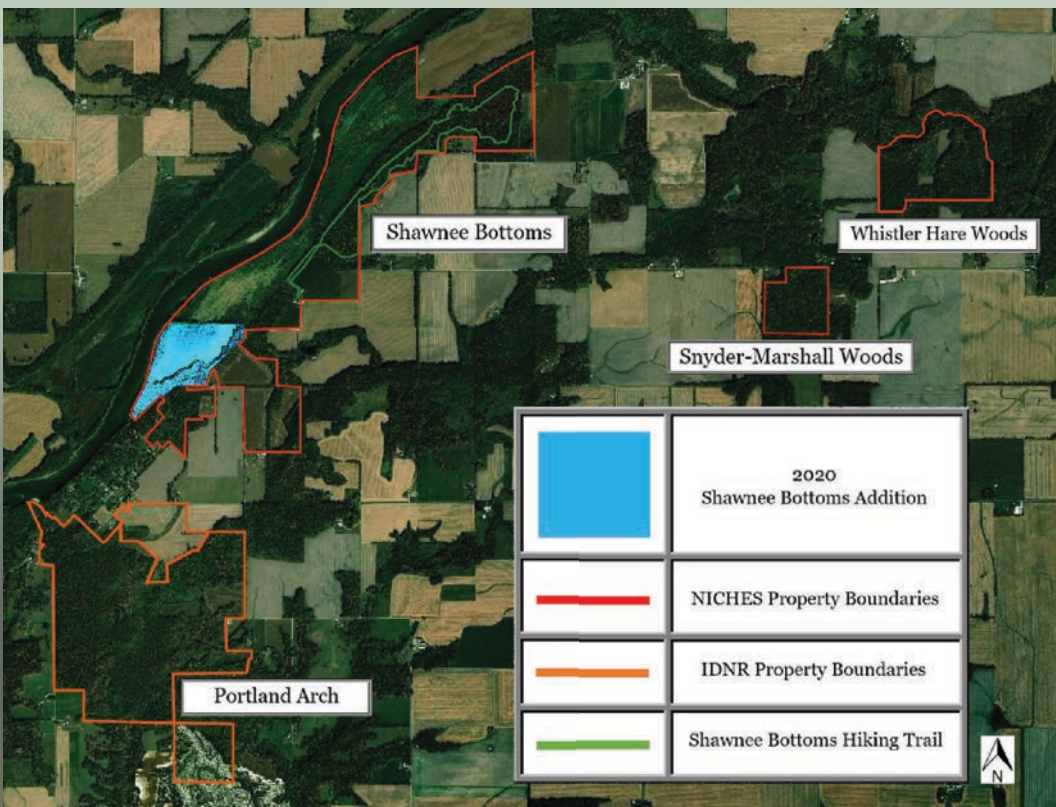
Our First 500+ Acre Preserve!

NICHES started the new year off strong with an addition of 59 acres to our Shawnee Bottoms property in Fountain County on January 2nd. The property began in 2002 with the purchase of 220 acres along the Wabash River Corridor. Over 18 years, we have completed 6 additional acquisitions and are proud to announce we have reached an impressive milestone for the organization, our first 500+ acre preserve! Providing large and highly connected habitats is a vital component for the sustained existence of many native plant and animal species. Trail camera monitoring at Shawnee Bottoms in 2019 has revealed a host of native wildlife species utilizing the property, including a variety of waterfowl, beavers, otters, and bobcat. The latter is a particularly encouraging sign for the resurging health of the ecosystem in that region. Bobcats, being solitary hunters, require a minimum of 600-700 acres of land to effectively hunt, live, and rear offspring. A study through the Indiana DNR found that bobcats are capable of dispersing up to 100 miles from where they were born in search of available habitat.



Pictured Right: 2019 trail camera footage from Shawnee Bottoms featuring bobcat, mink, great blue heron, and river otter. By protecting large continuous tracks of land, we are providing areas for these native species to not only survive, but flourish.

As we begin to observe these solitary meso-predators moving back into parts of our service area, we feel it speaks to the value of our contiguous land protection goals. By connecting more and more parcels of protected lands, we begin to re-establish the suitable range size and habitat requirements for some of our most sensitive wildlife species. Shawnee bottoms (518 acres) is also less than 1/3 of a mile north from Portland Arch, a 436 acre preserve owned and managed by the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves (See map 1). This most recent addition to Shawnee Bottoms also pushes our amount of continuously owned river frontage along the Wabash past 2 miles. Protecting land that neighbors these river corridors provides a number of environmental benefits, including establishing habitat for riparian plant and animal species, filtering agricultural runoff and pollutants before they are deposited in the river, and reducing the scale and pace of riverbank erosion.



Map 1: Pictured above is a satellite image of our Shawnee Bottoms property and surrounding nature preserves. Including Portland Arch and our Whistler Hare preserve (100 acres) there is over 1,000 acres of protected land along this section of the Wabash river valley.

You Help us Grow!

2020 Goals Update *(End of February)*

Campaign Goal: \$62,282 of \$250,000 raised

Board Goal: \$25,900 raised or pledged of \$25,000

Staff Goal: \$2,700 pledged of \$2,500

25 members (or more) giving at \$2,500: 16 of 25 committed

250 new members at a special rate of \$25: 30 of 250



Help us reach our 25th anniversary goals by sharing your NICHES stories with friends, family, & neighbors. Make a goal to recruit 3 new NICHES members this year!

Thank you to our Sponsors!



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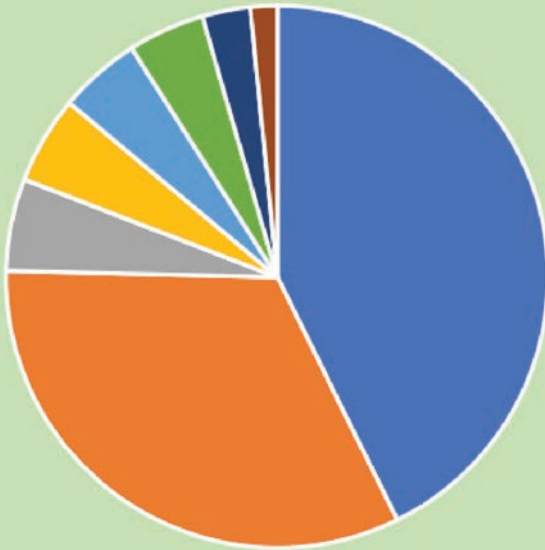
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NICHES by the Numbers

2019 NICHES Land Trust Income Distribution



- Land acquisition (foundation, partner, individuals) \$454k
- Individual \$347k
- Business \$58.2k
- Government Grants \$55.6k
- Foundation Grants (operations) \$51.8k
- Sales Income \$48.4k
- Misc (summer camp, inkind, service fee, farm rent) \$30.4k
- Community Foundation Distributions \$16.9k

Above is a 2019 financial summary of NICHES income distribution. We have been excited to see our annual proportion of income through individual giving steadily growing as our organizations positive impact in the local community expands. As we progress through our 25th anniversary and look towards the future, we will be relying on you to share the NICHES story and the natural areas we protect with others. Thank you for your continued support and for playing a part in the protection and celebration of our Northern Indiana Ecosystems!

NICHES

ADVENTURE

CAMP

~~WEEK 1: JUNE 8-12 (NEW)~~

~~WEEK 2: JUNE 15-19 FULL~~

~~WEEK 3: JUNE 22-26 FULL~~

Join us for a week out in nature exploring, hiking, paddling, cooking, creating, climbing, and more! Each week 11 campers between 11-14 years old will get to discover and learn about native ecosystems by being fully immersed in them.

For info email sam@nicheslandtrust.org

Register online at nicheslandtrust.org

KIDS NEED NATURE,

NATURE NEEDS KIDS

Camp

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