



THE SPROUT

NICHES LAND TRUST | WINTER 2021 | VOLUME 25 ISSUE 1
Looking Back at 2020 | Wabash River Greenway | Parker's Hickory Grove Farm

"To the mouse, snow means freedom from want and fear. ... To a hawk, a thaw means freedom from want and fear" - Aldo Leopold

Executive Director Update

HUGE thank you to all of you!! Each of you have helped us overcome obstacles and turned a year of sour milk into delicious yogurt. We hope that the momentum gained during our 25th anniversary year will lead to a productive conservation decade as we secure land for the benefit of native plants, animals, and all of us that need the land as well.

Page 12, has the story of Rick Parker and his brothers growing up on 400 West, and why they decided to honor the values of their parents and donate their land to NICHES. We initiated workdays in 2020 before the donation was complete by reaching out to NICHES members that lived nearby, some of whom were highlighted in the last newsletter for doing work on their own lands. What a joy, in a year with such strife and animus, to work alongside neighbors together for the betterment of the natural world. Hopefully the future will see more of us working side by side together for the betterment of natural world and society.

On page 14, see the breakdown of over 9,000 volunteer hours given in service with NICHES for the natural world in 2020. 9,000, that's a lot of effort pulling garlic mustard, on the fire line, and killing honeysuckle. The lands are showing the increase in sweat equity. The efforts of volunteers greatly extends our staff conservation impact and is helping our lands get ahead of the invasive species and thrive!

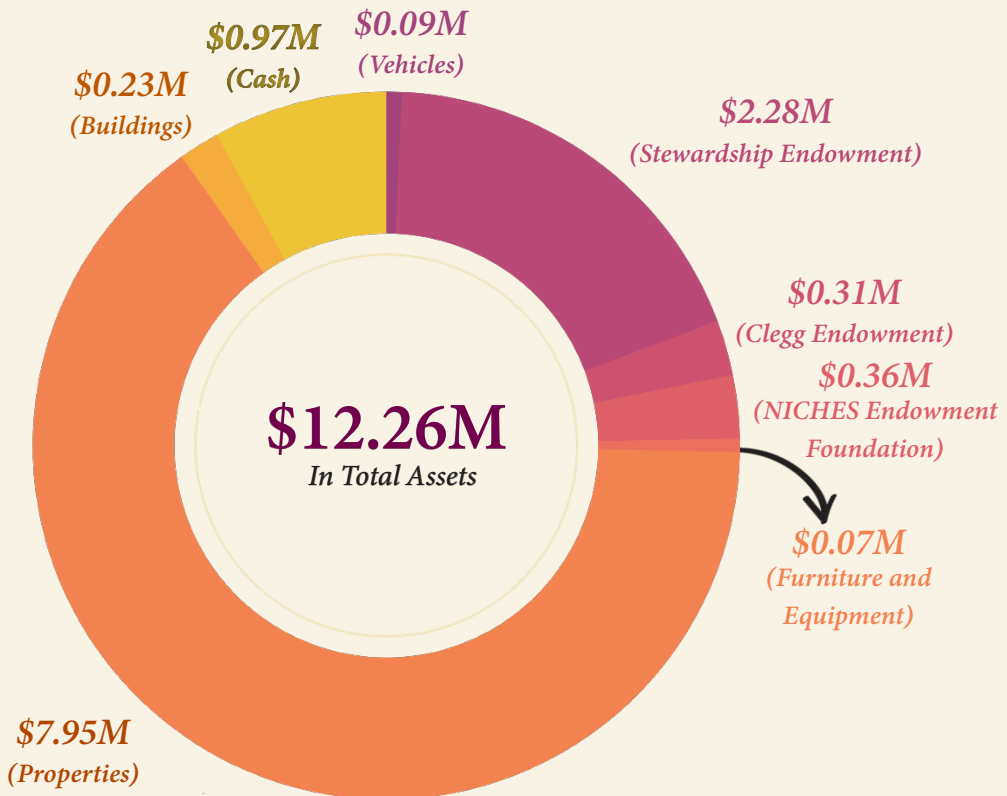
-NICHES Executive Director, Gus Nyberg
gnyberg@nicheslandtrust.org



Do you Like our Cover Art? This painting: *'Northern Harrier flying over Holley Savanna'*, was specially created for NICHES by our member and local artist Gabriela Sincich. Gabriela's art is known for her depictions of nature with great detail, reflecting her extended experience in the field of scientific illustration. this is the first of a series of artworks that Gabriela will create for our organization to represent the beautiful nature found on NICHES properties and to promote the mission of land conservation through art.

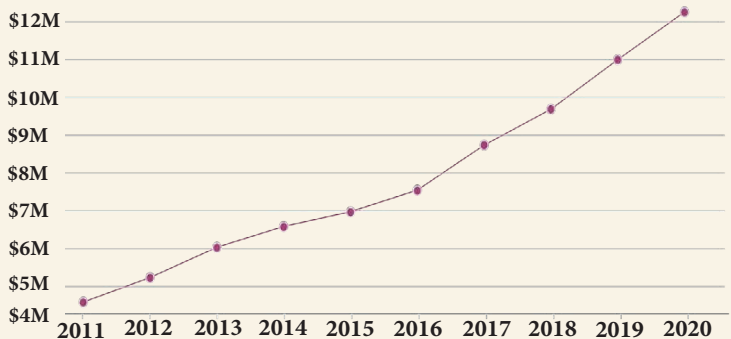
Would you like to learn How to draw Nature with Gabriela? We are working on some great ideas for Art and Nature programs and would like the feedback from our members. Please send us your comments/ thoughts to niches@nicheslandtrust.org.

End of Year Financial Position



Above are the 2020 unaudited financials for the organization, and as you can see, the year was a very strong financial year for us. We ended with close to \$2.9 million in the three endowments controlled by NICHES (not including the 6 community foundation accounts that are held in NICHES name) and over \$12 million total including land. We remain strongly in the black and are finding a great balance of grant funded work and unrestricted dollars to allow the organization the flexibility it needs to restore lands, maintain trails, connect youth, and keep up the maintenance of properties after the grants have done the initial lift.

Right: NICHES end of year total assets (in millions of dollars) over the past decade shows steady growth.



Looking back at 2020

A monthly review of what made this unusual year extraordinary

January: Work began preparing Roy Whistler Wildlife Area for an extension of its rare sand barrens habitat. Later in the year a nearby population of state endangered Hill's Thistle was identified and seed was collected and transferred to the site to preserve local genetics.



February: Our 2020 Annual Meeting took place and a panel of NICHES founding mothers and fathers recounted how the organization began 25 years ago. Guests attended a waterfowl hike and owl prowl before and after the meeting.

March: NICHES hosted a 9 person Americorps crew for what we thought would be 7 weeks, as covid surged the group was called back after only a week of service. NICHES fire season was forced to end after 4 burns, all events were postponed.



April: NICHES Stewardship Director Bob Easter delivered a Zoom presentation detailing the organizations work restoring glacial relict white pine populations. The lecture attracted attention and support from the DNR which helped push the project into the next phase.

May: NICHES resumed outdoor volunteer workdays with limited attendance. The community stepped up to fill over 100, 3 hour garlic mustard pulling shifts which allows us to make up for lost time battling the invasive plant.



June: We welcomed our 2 summer interns, Zach Neff and Catherine Fisher. Over the next 3 months they help assist in a variety of stewardship and outreach tasks. Together they took on the stewardship of our Frank and Ada Beineke Memorial Forest.

July: After postponing for a month, NICHES hosted 3 weeks of Summer Adventure Camp for local kids 11-14 years old. Campers got to hike, float, and explore their way through some of Northern Indiana's most scenic natural areas. NICHES also hosted hikes to observe and help pollinate native orchid species.



August: Volunteers came together to participate in our annual cleanup of local waterways. Each year we target different sections of the Wildcat, Big Pine, and Sugar Creek Corridors to remove a diverse assortment of trash both new and old.

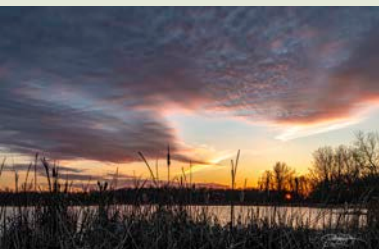
September: Our Black Rock Society Meeting took place virtually this year with informative breakaway sessions lead by NICHES Staff and local experts in conservation. Other in person events this month included guided hikes, volunteer days, and a monarch butterfly tagging citizen science project



October: NICHES began work with another Americorps crew for 3 weeks. Our main focus revolved around the removal of honeysuckle and the implementation of controlled burns. The crew also helped set up a public jack-o-lantern hike at Clegg Memorial Garden which offered a covid safe Halloween activity for the community.



November: Unseasonably warm weather and low winds this month provided the perfect conditions for multiple weeks of foliar spraying and controlled burning. The window of opportunity allowed us to burn some preserves that were missed due to the covid shutdown in March.



December: NICHES finished its 25th anniversary year strong thanks to our growing community of friends and supporters. With your help we reached all of our annual fundraising goals, maintained our stewardship momentum, and retired more land into conservation!

Meet our 2021 Board Slate!



Mark Your Calendars: Join us on **April 10th at 4PM** for our Annual Meeting!

Due to the ongoing pandemic this years meeting will be virtual, please check our website for details and info on attendance limited hikes hosted by NICHES friends and staff the day of the event.



"I grew up as a country kid, playing in the woods by my parents' house. Being a parent myself, I want that same experience for my daughter and for her to have places to fall in love with nature too! I own a Farmers Insurance Agency in West Lafayette and hope to expand my network and bring my contacts into the fold of NICHES programs." **-Jenna Isch**

"I am most proud of the success of our 25th Anniversary Goals. Despite being thrown a Covid Curveball, we were able to redirect and were still able to meet all of the lofty goals we set for ourselves. As the Development Chair, I am extremely proud of what the Board and entire staff were able to accomplish despite such large obstacles." **-Trent Hanthorn**



"I am proud of what I have accomplished at Clegg in my tenure on the board and as a part of the Clegg Committee. This past year the trails have been used extensively which makes the other volunteers and I feel like we are making a positive contribution to the citizens of Tippecanoe county and beyond." **-John Graveel**

"I believe that our creeks and rivers are the circulatory system of our natural environment and so I am most proud of helping NICHES protect lands along Big Pine Creek, the Wabash River and other vital waterways."

-Mike Murr



"As a board member I am most proud of my involvement in the strategic plan revisions for the organization. Although revising a strategic plan isn't as fun or exciting as something like a prescribed fire, it helps chart the course for NICHES and commits us to a high level of stewardship which sets NICHES apart from other Land Trusts." **-Jarred Brooke**

"I am honored to be associated with NICHES and its fine staff and volunteers, all working towards a common goal of preserving land in its natural state so that native species may thrive and people can enjoy the outdoors. This, along with meeting our ambitious ten year goals for fund raising and property acquisition, make me most proud!" **-Bill Arthur**



"I believe NICHES is in a unique position to supplement efforts by other organizations to help make the Greater Lafayette area a community of choice. NICHES efforts to accumulate land, improve the quality of the land, and preserve it for future generations is a mission that resonates deeply with me." **-Brent Talcott**

Growing Williams Woods

In April of 2017, I had the opportunity to meet Jeff and Bonnie Williams at their family farm along Opossum Run in western Warren County. They were in the process of determining the future of the land and reached out to NICHES see if we would be interested in purchasing the wooded acres on the farm. Together we walked and talked about the natural features of the woodland, the family's history in the area and the possibility of the land being protected in perpetuity by NICHES.

The woodland had been mostly untouched, outside of simple recreation, for many decades. The lack of fencing around the perimeter indicated that there had not been grazing in the woodland, and the absence of any detectible infestations of invasives species had me very interested in the potential of the property as a nature preserve. After some discussion they decided that they would be interested in selling a portion of the wooded acres and the 20 acre farm field to the west of the woods. NICHES made an initial purchase of land from the family at a bargain sale for 86 acres in 2018.

I knew that the farm was very near the historic transition area between the Tallgrass Prairie and Eastern Deciduous Forest, but some detailed research revealed that Charles C. Deam had collected about a dozen prairie species in the parcel to the west of the property in the early 1900's. We decided that we should restore the row crops to silt-loam savanna vegetation and kept it in production of soybeans for a couple of seasons as we planned for a high-quality restoration. After receiving project funding through the NRCS, a commercial mix of seed was ordered from Spence and staff and volunteers worked to hand collect seed from remnant populations to supplement that mix. At the same time, we were planning that portion of the project, we also entered a cost-share agreement with the USFWS to thin overabundant sugar maples from the woodland. In November of 2020 we completed our first prescribed fire over 33 acres of thinned woodland and we were able to purchase another 32 acre tract of the Williams' property downstream on Opossum Run.

The new addition to the preserve includes some impressive open grown white oaks on high bluffs along Opossum Run. Invasive species on the new tract will be controlled and the healing process of the area will continue. The Williams' family is thrilled with the progress that has been made on the land under NICHES ownership making the site a prime example of how NICHES works with private landowners and funding partners to implement vital restoration and revitalization work in west-central Indiana.

-NICHES Stewardship Director, Bob Easter
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Opossum Run at Williams Woods. *Photograph by: Chad Phelps.*



Wabash River Green Way

In early October I embarked on the Wabash River with the goal of traveling the 10 mile distance from Granville Bridge to Cicott Park. Many of the protected lands along this stretch of River have become familiar to me over the years, both as a Purdue student seeking an escape from campus and later as a NICHES employee working to manage them. Hiking at sites like Black Rock and the Ross Hills were among some of my first deep dives into the forests and fens of this region and the natural beauty I found there helped fuel my desires to pursue a career in conservation.

Joining NICHES offered me even more insight into the state of what is and isn't protected along this stretch of river. Looking at maps and tracking the land acquisition progress of the organization in this area revealed a pace of conservation that's not only holding steady but actually picking up momentum. From the earlier additions of properties like Wabash Bottoms and Weiler Leopold in 1999, to our coming addition of Twin Creek Farms in early 2021, we have made significant progress retiring, restoring, and connecting these riparian habitats. When you add our properties to the mosaic of other protected lands held by the County Park Department, Purdue, and WREC an image of a connected river corridor starts to come into focus.

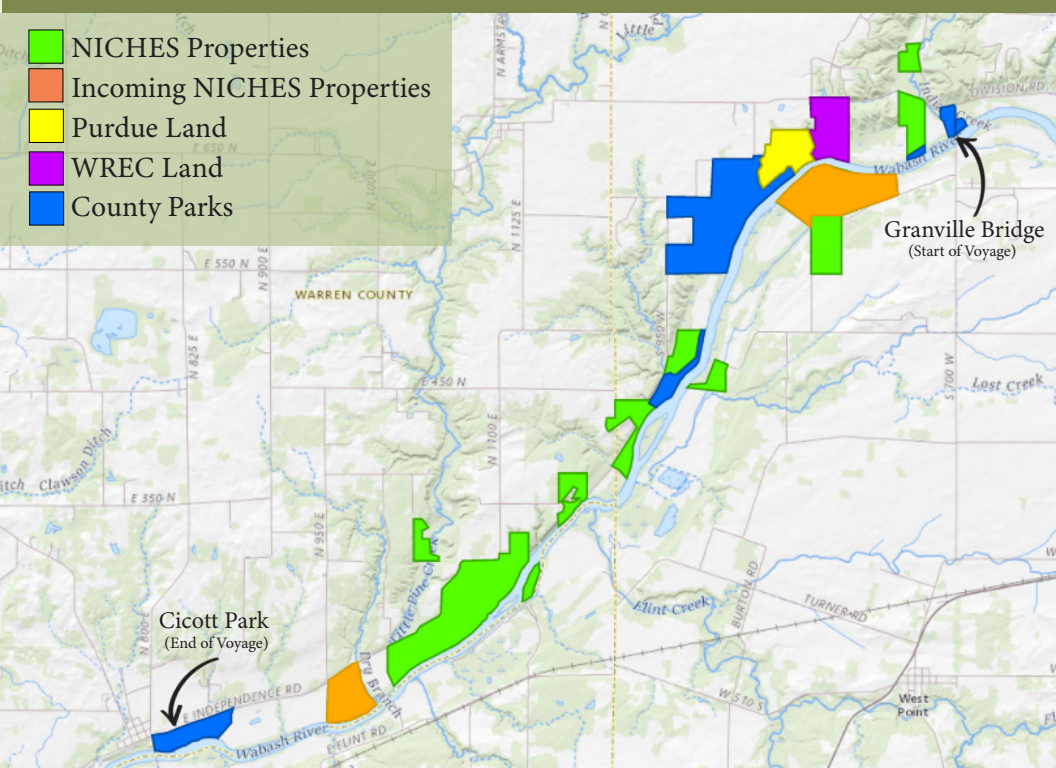
This fall I learned that NICHES would be partnering with the Laura Hare Charitable Trust to move forward with yet another project along this section of the Wabash in early 2021. This newest parcel, just shy of 200 acres, will be NICHES longest single addition ever of Wabash River Creek frontage in Tippecanoe County (1.2 miles). Second in our entire service range only to the initial 220 acre purchase of Shawnee Bottoms in Fountain County 18 years ago, which included 1.6 miles of Wabash frontage. The property also connects up with our Granville Sand Barren and Whistler Wildlife Area preserves to create 274 acres of contiguous habitat.

With this key addition in place, I knew it was time to start seriously visualizing the entire corridor of Wabash Floodplain from Granville to Cicott Park as something that will be functionally connected within the next decade. Even when you look closer at the pieces that are missing you will find the majority are private lands enrolled in federal wetland / conservation reserve programs. For the first time since settlers moved into this area 200 years ago, we are within sight of returning this Wabash River Greenway back to a natural state. It was with this exciting prospect in mind that I headed out on my downstream journey, determined to traverse the central artery to which these floodplains drain.

Not too soon after hitting the water I was met with the eastern border of the soon to be property, a thin line of trees stood to separate its internal agricultural fields from the rivers edge. When NICHES retires these croplands, it will create a 1/3 mile buffer for agrochemicals to filter through before they are deposited in the river as well as provide space for us to expand the rare sand barrens habitat on adjoining sites. While moving at the lazy pace of the river, the properties waterfront border seemed to stretch on forever. As the languid waters carried me further downstream I was truly humbled at how rare of an occasion it was for me not to have protected lands to either my right or left side. During the 10 mile float this was only the case for a total of 2 miles.

As the sun dipped below the horizon I pulled off to sleep under the stars on Carr Island, a preserve NICHES acquired in 2019. In the morning I used hand tools to clear a patch of honeysuckle from the islands eastern most point and then continued my journey to its end at Cicott Park. Experiencing the corridor from the pace and perspective of the Wabash presented a new dimension to this massive conservation project that has been decades in the making. As I reflect I try to imagine the many changes these banks have witnessed over the past 2 centuries and what changes lie ahead on the path to their permanent protection. How many, like myself, have these sanctuaries afforded peace and rejuvenation, and how many countless others do their beauty have yet to ensnare?

-NICHES Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, Sam Cody
sam@nicheslandtrust.org



Parker's Hikory Grove Farm

Herb Parker grew up on a hardscrabble farm in western Tennessee, and as a teenager during the Depression was given a share of the family's land to farm, entirely on his own. Dortha Tudor was born in Letts, Indiana, a small town that is now merely a crossroads near Greensburg, and against the wishes of her father, ventured on her own to Cincinnati to become a Registered Nurse. These independent minded members of the "Greatest Generation" met during WWII in Paris, Tennessee, while Herb was home on Leave and they hastily married before his reassignment to the Pacific.

After the war, Herb earned his PhD in Biochemistry at Purdue, and joined the faculty. Having never lost his love of farming, he and Dortha bought 23 acres of land a few miles west of campus on what is now 400 W. Together they built a house and moved in with their 3 young boys, Rick, Steve, and Dan. They named their home Hickory Grove Farm.

In between school and sports, the boys used the land to its fullest, playing in the creek, sledding in the winter, and fishing the pond in the summer. In high school, Rick fondly remembers traipsing around the property with net in hand, to create an insect collection for Freshman Biology, catching zebra, giant and eastern tiger swallowtails, and putting out brown sugar mixtures on tree trunks on hot humid August nights to capture underwing moths. Steve played on one of the legendary Coach Al Rickard's first football teams at Klondike High School, and Dan was a member of the last class to graduate from Klondike before its consolidation into Lafayette Harrison High School.



Herb and Dortha with Grandson Alex by the pond (1982)

The land provided opportunity to explore and challenge oneself, offering self-discovery at the cost of scraped knees and dirty trousers. The three boys, shaped by Herb and Dortha's upbringing and the land they grew up on, became an attorney (Rick), an anesthesiologist (Steve), and an engineer/machining business owner (Dan).

Life on the farm for the Parkers boys (late 1950's)



Herb and Dot continued to live on the land after the boys moved on, farming and enjoying time with family and friends. Herb died in 1996 and Dortha stayed on the land for several years before moving to Westminster Village. But the land stayed in the family – no one had the heart to let it be sold.

With Dortha's passing in early 2020, the Parker boys reached out to NICHES about donating the land in their parent's memory, with the understanding that the land be open to the public, to be enjoyed and used to connect people with the natural world. An additional 2 acres on the southern border of the property, donated by a neighbor, are also set to be added to the preserve.

In the Fall of 2020 NICHES stewards and volunteers set to work clearing the property of honeysuckle which was largely limited to its forested edges. Spring plans include constructing a 6 car parking lot and adding 2 miles of trail. The Parker Boys, now with families of their own, reconvened at their childhood home to play an active part in its restoration. NICHES intends to open the property to the public on Easter Day 2021, ensuring that future generations of Tippecanoe County residents have the same opportunity as the Parker's to grow into engaged citizens, with their feet forever attached to the natural world.



Rick Parker helping to prepare the preserve for its public debut in April.

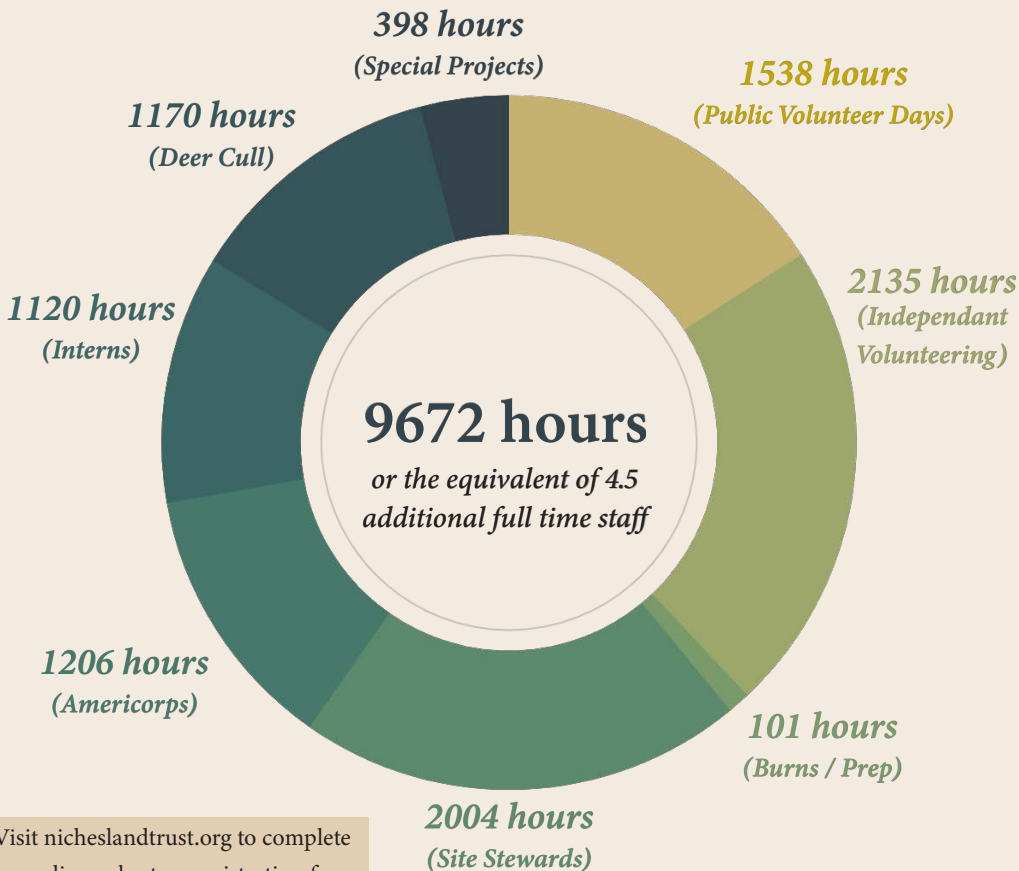
Thank you to the Community Foundation of Greater Lafayette and Peacefield Welding for their support in constructing the Parker's Hickory Grove Farm parking lot!

The
Community
Foundation
OF GREATER LAFAYETTE



Thank You Volunteers!

Conservation is a lot like pushing a boulder uphill, if you take a break you risk losing all of your progress. In normal years, NICHES has a reliable community of volunteers at our backs helping to keep things moving forward. When the world shut down in March we were faced with the sobering prospect of losing much of this support. We had to find new ways to engage volunteers, even then we didn't know if the call to arms would be answered. As the year marched on the assistance kept rolling in through public workdays, Americorps teams, and the independent mobilization of neighbors and friends. By the end of the summer, we had already surpassed our total number of volunteer hours recorded in 2019. In the fall we had our most successful deer cull in the organization's history. Once the dust settled in December it was clear that our even our most hopeful expectations had been blown out of the water. Thank you to everyone who helped us keep charging forward during this challenging year!



You Help us Reach our Goals!

2020 Goals Progress *(End of Year)*

250 new members at a special rate of \$25: 256 of 250

25 members giving at \$2,500 (or more): 30 of 25 committed

Campaign Goal: \$300,000 of \$250,000 raised

NICHES Zoom Presentation Series

February: 'Trail - Delphi to Portland Arch'
(Speaker - Gus Nyberg)

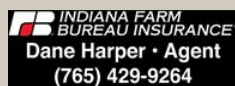
March: 'NICHES Volunteering and Outreach'
(Speaker - Sam Cody)

April: 'Birding 101'

(Speaker - Roxie Easter)

May: 'Spring Wildflowers'
(Speaker - Dan Childs)

Visit NICHES website calendar for details



Zoom Series Sponsors

Thank You to our Additional Sponsors!



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For more information on sponsorships, contact our Deputy Director, Julie Rubsam at jrubsam@nicheslandtrust.org or call 765-423-1605.



In early August, a group of women from the Happy Housekeeper & Co reached out to NICHES and offered their assistance after they learned that several trees and structures at Clegg Memorial Garden had been vandalized with spray paint. A family member of the group, who had passed away earlier in the year, was a regular hiker at Clegg and they saw the situation as a constructive way to honor his memory and give back to their community. It took the women several hours in the summer heat to undo what the vandal had certainly done in just a few moments. After everything had been cleaned we shared the groups good deeds on Facebook and were shocked when the post only received 6% of the engagement that the original graffiti photos received. As a culture we gain nothing by hyper focusing on the thoughtless acts that make us angry without equally recognizing the selfless and kind acts that are constantly taking place all around us.



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