

Executive Director Update

This Edition of The Sprout shares the history of our administrative headquarters, Clegg Memorial Garden, as part of our continued celebration of NICHES' 30th anniversary.

A few details of this story buzz around my brain like a bumblebee in a lady slipper orchid flower looking for the way out. But the most important detail is that the Cleggs were kicked off private property while trying to enjoy lunch along Wildcat Creek. This frustrating moment inspired them to pursue their own country retreat on the banks of the Wildcat. So many of us have had the same frustrating experience, but most of us are not fortunate enough to purchase recreational land. With all the development leading to and surrounding our headquarters, it is difficult for me to imagine this area as the country.

Later in their lives, when tragedy struck and the grief of losing their son was overwhelming, a dear friend suggested sharing the gardens with the public. This friend recognized the healing joy of giving to others and reminded them why they had to purchase the property to begin with. I'm personally grateful for this act of friendship that spurred the act of generosity and protection.

see the chickadees flying. The green treetops of oaks and hickories evoke thoughts of protected natural areas for species to survive, hiking trails for future generations, and a lasting family legacy.

Donations of land are a powerful gift. Two-thirds of NICHES' protected acreage have been donated either in full or via a bargain sale. The Clegg family and the many land donors that followed them have inspired us to care for this entrusted land to the highest standard. NICHES' newly completed Stewardship Facility will help us do just that!

This Sprout is bursting with stories featuring our accomplishments in land protection, stewardship, and community engagement. Please enjoy this edition and celebrate with us NICHES' growth as charted in the centerfold. I hope you feel inspired to help NICHES protect more places in the country!

-NICHES Executive Director, Shannon Stanis shannon@nicheslandtrust.org



Mark Your Calendars

Save the dates and join NICHES staff, friends, and volunteers at our upcoming stewardship, outreach, and organizational events!

SEPTEMBER

Planting Our Seeds: An Evening with the Founders

September 18th @ The Lilly Nature Center (Celery Bog, West Lafayette) (Reception 4:30 pm - Event 6:00 pm)
Join us as we celebrate NICHES' 30th anniversary with a special panel on the beginnings of our land trust. Executive Director Shannon Stanis and former board member Bill Arthur will host a conversation with founding members. Panelists include Ted Harris, Dan McCain, Jim McGlone, Wally Morrison, George Parker, Barry Rubin, Greg Shaner, and Susan Ulrich.

Wildflower Walk

(Members Only)

September 19th @ Granville Sand Barrens (10:00 am - 12:00 pm)

Join NICHES board member Kent
Walters for a guided hike through
Granville Sand Barrens to explore and
identify the wildflowers in bloom. This
walk coincides with the peak flowering
season of one of Indiana's densest
populations of the state-endangered
golden aster.

Monarch Tagging Event

(Members Only)

September 21st @ Granville Sand Barrens (11:00 am - 1:00 pm)

Take part in a citizen science project to tag monarch butterflies and help provide biologists with more insight into their migration patterns. Insect nets and tagging materials will be provided. Registration is limited to 12 participants.

"Wisdom of Trees" Mindfulness Hike

September 28th @ Fall Creek Gorge (2:00 pm - 4:00 pm)

NICHES Land Trust invites you to the next installment of our quarterly Mindfulness Hike Series, presented in partnership with A Work in Progress Faith Community. This fall's "Wisdom"-themed hike will celebrate the deeprooted wisdom of trees and feature a special presentation by Dr. Bill Hoover, retired Purdue professor of Forestry and Natural Resources. This event is free, but registration is required.

OCTOBER

"Welcome to the Dark Side" Mothing Event

October 3rd @ Clegg Memorial Garden (7:00 pm - 9:00 pm)

Join Indiana moth expert, Jeanette
Jaskula, for a fascinating evening on the
Dark Side as we explore the secret life of
moths. Enjoy an engaging presentation
followed by hands-on exploration at light
and bait stations - registration required.

Fall Harvest Presentation

October 18th @ Clegg Memorial Garden (2:00 pm - 3:00 pm)

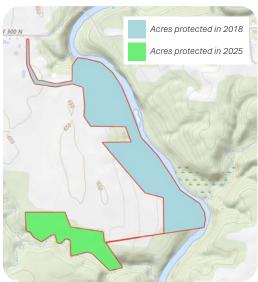
Explore the surprising connections between folklore and science in this engaging program about the wild autumn harvest presented by local naturalist Karen Cody. Discover the facts and lore behind nuts, berries, roots, and other native treasures of the Eastern Deciduous Forest.

Swanson's Bluff Expansion

Overlooking the water of the Big Pine Creek in Warren County are sandstone bluffs, calcareous seeps, old oak trees, and glacial relic white pines. Views of this land from the creek are breathtaking and evoke wonder for the natural world. Special pockets of this rare habitat are protected by NICHES Land Trust thanks to many land donors over the years. One of those donors recently gifted an additional 10 acres to NICHES this spring, bringing our total in the Big Pine Creek Valley to 442 acres.

In 2018, Bob and Roy Coolman donated 26 acres of this special land along Big Pine Creek to NICHES Land Trust. The brothers named the property "Swanson's Bluff" after their beloved neighbors, the Swanson family. At the time of the donation, they retained a small acreage with the family cabin and Roy retained additional woods to the south along Hogue's Run, a tributary of the Big Pine.

Bob and Roy visit their cabin often and continue to enjoy the donated acres. Roy has a passion for regenerative agriculture and took a special interest in NICHES stewardship practices. The Coolman brothers observed and participated as NICHES carefully removed invasive species, opened light through removal of midstory maple trees, and returned prescribed fire at Swanson's Bluff. Watching the understory plant community and wildlife community flourish at the NICHES preserve inspired Roy to complete the same stewardship practices on his retained acreage. After intensive manual labor to remove honeysuckle and thin maples, Roy witnessed a drastic positive change in the understory in his woods along Hogue's Run. The nearly barren understory became lush with native plants. This positive response to management that had been guided by NICHES, coupled with Roy's recognition of his limitations associated with aging, helped Roy decide it was time to donate his remaining 10 acres to NICHES. Roy called us for a conversation about permanent protection and stewardship by the next generation. In May of 2025, the donation was finalized!



The new acres at the Swanson's Bluff addition feature a canopy of mature oak trees and healthy wildlife habitat—badgers have been spotted here! The woods provide an important buffer for agricultural runoff, filtering pollutants from the rainwater before it enters Hogue's Run and the Big Pine. NICHES is grateful for the generosity and forward thinking of Roy Coolman. We are honored to protect these acres for the future.

Land Donation Highlight

You probably already know that NICHES permanently protects natural places from development, but did you know that two-thirds of the lands we protect were donated by individuals just like you?

During our first year as a nonprofit, NICHES acquired its first property through a generous gift of a 20-acre island on the Wabash River, the Weaver Family Nature Preserve. Since then, we have grown to protect nearly 5,000 acres, more than 3,200 of which have been generously donated!

Whether it's beloved family farmland like the 400-acre Farris Estate or a 24-acre habitat like Honey Branch Bluff, NICHES does its best to ensure that the lands entrusted to our organization remain in their natural state forever. One of the finest legacies you can leave for future generations is a verdant and thriving ecosystem. NICHES is honored to have been trusted by so many other generous individuals who invest in

environmental conservation.

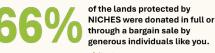
All methods for donating land to NICHES Land Trust give you the opportunity to preserve your family's history and share nature with generations to come. Depending on the type of donation, you can also receive various income or estate tax benefits. We are glad to speak with you about these donation methods and their benefits, but we always recommend you work with your legal and financial advisers to determine how your land protection options will impact your individual circumstances.

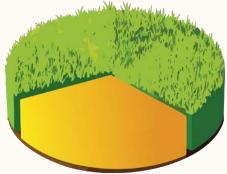
NICHES' commitment to our lands is forever, so we carefully decide which properties to acquire and evaluate each individual acquisition's conservation values, priorities, and challenges. If you have questions about protecting your land, we'd be honored to speak with you.

-NICHES Development Director, Ann Fields Monical ann@nicheslandtrust.org

Common Land Donation Methods:

- Make a donation in your lifetime.
- Leave your property to NICHES as a beguest in your will.
- Use reserved life estate to title the property to NICHES, allowing you (and your children) to live on or access rights to the property.
- Sell the land at a discount through a bargain sale and receive a charitable deduction for the donated "discount" amount.





Timber Management

Over the dormant season of 2024/2025 NICHES completed a couple of management timber harvests at our Shawnee Bottoms and Potawatomi Trail preserves. Both sites have seen over a decade of stewardship including invasive removal, understory thinning, and prescribed fire to prepare them for a reduction in canopy and an influx of light to the herbaceous layer.

At Potawatomi Trail, a smaller project of about 10-acres, we saw a stunning mass bloom of heart-leaved skullcap, an uncommon species across NICHES range which has been diligently pollinated by hummingbirds and bumblebees early this summer. Other species like firepink, elm-leaved goldenrod and many native grass and sedge species are thriving across the harvested area.

Shawnee Bottoms was a much larger portion of this timber stand management project with an area of about 90 acres (20% of the preserve) targeted for canopy reduction. As the years have gone by, we have gotten glimpses of what could be at this site with more light. When beavers took out a large stand of trees at Shawnee about a decade ago, I spotted the

Observation

Nearly a decade ago, beaver activity at Shawnee Bottoms caused a localized disturbance along the old Wabash–Erie Canal towpath. As the beavers felled trees and flooded certain areas, we observed previously unrecorded understory species beginning to emerge from the seed bank. This positive ecological response to disturbance was observed again 8 years later, when a windstorm created openings in the overstory, once again allowing suppressed species to thrive.



Planning for the timber harvests began well in advance, with a focus on balancing short-term impacts and long-term ecological benefits. Preparation involved several years of invasive species removal to ready the site. The harvest strategy prioritized the removal of overcrowded and poor-quality trees to enhance structural diversity, increase sunlight reaching the

forest floor, and to support the regeneration of native species.

Outreach

In fall 2024, NICHES hosted several guided hikes at Shawnee Bottoms and Potawatomi Trail to share plans for upcoming ecological timber harvests. These events helped explain the process, benefits, and stewardship goals behind the work. Since timber harvests are often viewed as destructive or profit-driven, transparency and education are essential to building trust and advancing our mission of responsible stewardship.





Preparation

first rose turtlehead plants ever recorded in Fountain County. Areas with understory thinning and prescribed fire pulsed with life but were dampened by the shade of the mid-summer canopy. Then, in the summer of 2023, a howling windstorm swept through the area, toppling many large trees and snapping the crowns off others. The result was a series of large canopy gaps and a twisted mess of downed wood. These areas proceeded to be filled with blooming plants through the fall and attracted significantly more insect and bird activity than the surrounding shaded areas. This is when I decided it was time to start the process of opening the canopy across this section of the property.

Since the harvest was completed in early 2025, we have

been back to work on the site and monitor development multiple times including a visit for a site inspection on July 9th. I was greeted by a beautiful open oak canopy and lush herbaceous growth, including blooming clumps of Culver's root, woodland sunflower, downy skullcap, starry catchfly, leafcup, purple node Joe-Pye weed, zig-zag spiderwort, waxy meadow rue, lance-leaved loosestrife and purple milkweed with developing seed pods. There is a time and a place for responsibly managed timber harvests, and I can confidently say we hit the mark with these two, and with our continued guidance these sites will have a better future because of it.

-NICHES Stewardship Director, Bob Easter rleaster@nicheslandtrust.org

Follow-up

Following the timber harvests, NICHES organized volunteer workdays and worked with a 9-member AmeriCorps NCCC team to complete follow-up projects at both preserves. At Potawatomi Trail, volunteers stacked brush and feathered the sharp edge between the prairie restoration and adjacent oak slopes to create a more natural transition. At Shawnee Bottoms, the AmeriCorps team restored approximately three miles of public hiking trails affected by harvest activity.



In early 2025, NICHES partnered with forestry contractors to conduct a timber harvest across ~100 acres at Shawnee Bottoms and Potawatomi Trail. The team worked during the frozen winter months and utilized existing trails and access paths as much as possible to reduce understory disturbance and compaction. NICHES stewardship staff coordinated extensively throughout the process to ensure ecological goals were being met while minimizing impacts to sensitive habitats.



As we move into the future, NICHES will maintain the progress achieved through both timber harvests by conducting regular prescribed fires. These controlled burns will reduce woody debris, suppress invasive species, encourage the regeneration of native, fire-adapted plant communities, and preserve the open woodland structure established by the harvests.

Maintenance

Harvest

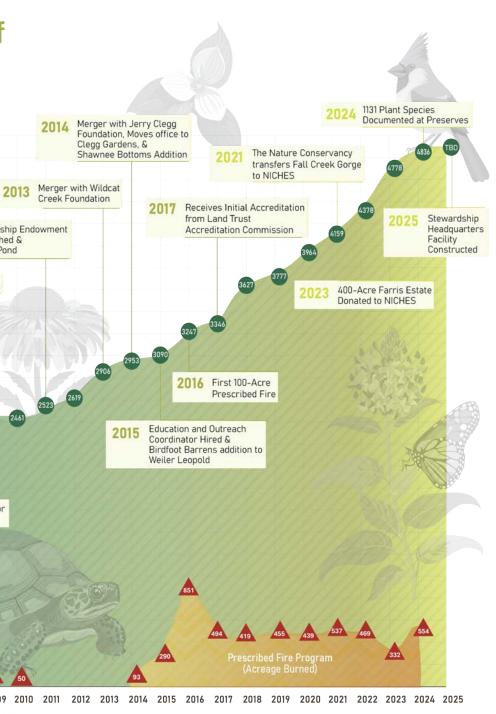


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Summer Outreach Highlights

From April 11th to May 11th, NICHES hosted its 6th annual Spring 'War of the Weeds' volunteer effort to improve understory plant diversity in our woodlands. This year volunteers registered for 316 pulling shifts which equates to nearly 1,000 hours of invasive species removal! These organized shifts were held across 30 different public workdays with 80% being led by volunteers themselves.





On April 27th and July 26th, NICHES partnered with a Work in Progress Faith Community to host 2 more events in our quarterly Mindfulness Hike Series. April's event took place at Williams Woods, and highlighted the preserves extraordinary display of Virginia Bluebells and focused on the theme of 'Renewal.' July's hike took place at NICHES Warren Piece Easement, centered on the theme of "Awe" and explored the biology and behavior of fireflies.

On April 27th, NICHES Board Member Brad Carlson led a volunteer group from Wabash College at our newest preserve along Sugar Creek in Montgomery County. The group focused their efforts on clearing old trash from several ravines on the preserve.





On May 12th, the 6th grade class of Klondike Middle School helped pull garlic mustard at Granville Sand Barrens Preserve. With over 170 students participating, it was the largest single volunteer workday in NICHES Land Trust's history!

Between June 2nd and June 20th, NICHES hosted 3 weeks of our annual Summer Adventure Camp. The goal of the camp is to increase local youths' interest in and understanding of the natural world. Highlights of this year's program included hiking, climbing, howling with wolves, and witnessing an eastern box turtle lay eggs.



On June 25th, members of Purdue's Mandela Washington Fellowship Program gathered at our Granville Sand Barrens Preserve in Tippecanoe County to help remove invasive species. On July 13th, NICHES hosted the members for a follow up conservation hike and discussion at several Warren County preserves. After the hike the evening concluded with handmade pizza and dancing. This program is just one example of how the impacts of NICHES stewardship and outreach programs can reach far beyond our service range.





Thank you to our 2 crews of YMCA Camp
Tecumseh Campers in Leadership Training (CILT's)
for helping pull invasive species at our Spring
Creek Sanctuary and Frogs' Glory Preserves on
July 1st and 29th. This is the 5th consecutive year
that the CILT program has returned to these sites
to help maintain the work of past campers!

On July 5th NICHES members and friends gathered at Big Shawnee Creek in Fountain County to kick off our Summer Creek Hike series with Stewardship Director Bob Easter. On August 2nd the series continued with a romp through Rock Creek in Warren County. These guided hikes offer the perfect opportunity to cool off while learning about the unique ecosystems that thrive in and around our local streams.





On July 12th, NICHES participated in the Wabash Riverfest. For many years NICHES has helped share and celebrate the Wabash River at this amazing community event by operating an outreach booth and hosting a ~4.5-mile float trip from Davis Ferry to Tapawingo Park. This year we were able to get nearly 100 participants on the water in rafts, canoes, and kayaks.

On August 8th, our Summer Seasonal Stewards, Maddy Parr and Cass Steininger, concluded their summer season. Over 3.5 months, their efforts supported a range of projects including invasive species removal, site inspections, summer camp, and the transition into our stewardship facility space.



Stewardship Facility Completed

NICHES Land Trust has officially completed construction and moved into our new Stewardship Facility in Warren County!

The Stewardship Facility was a priority outlined in NICHES' 2030 Strategic plan. The strategic plan has ambitious goals for land protection, land stewardship, and community engagement. To meet our land and water protection goals, NICHES requires a facility that is large enough to store our equipment and specially designed to support stewarding these habitats to the highest standard.

In 2020, NICHES purchased a parcel of land in Warren County at the weighted center of the organization's existing and known future holdings (including land in estate plans and priorities for land protection). The property had been previously developed and used as a livestock transfer station, meaning NICHES could re-use already-developed land for the facility. This opportunity further aligned the project with the organization's values of careful, sustainable development in the community.

Stewardship Director Bob Easter worked with partners and volunteers to design our facility. He visited the facilities of other land protection agencies and took away the best practices.

After NICHES diligently planned and fundraised for several years, we broke May 8, 2025, and our stewardship team is already putting the 6,000 square feet of space to use! The stewardship team uses the facility daily to coordinate stewardship and to pick up, drop off, and maintain supplies.

The facility has dedicated rooms for different uses including:

- Shop/Garage space for equipment storage and maintenance
- Water storage room for daily stewardship and prescribed fire season needs
- Seed cleaning and storage room for habitat restoration projects
- Herbicide storage room
- Kitchen/office space for a comfortable work environment and events

This project's success has been supported by the generosity of individuals and private foundations who contributed to the project. Special thanks to Peter and Mary Sue Waser for generous support that gave the project momentum and to North Central Health Services, Roy A. Whistler Foundation, Community Foundation of Greater Lafayette, McAllister Foundation, and Warren County Community Foundation for providing major support of this project.

We are proud to have accomplished this long-term goal for the organization, and we could not have done it without your support!



NICHES Headquarters History

In the 1930s, Harold and Ruth Clegg wanted to picnic on Wildcat Creek but found there was no publicly accessible place to enjoy the scenic beauty. So, they purchased what would become Clegg Memorial Garden in the late 1930s as their country retreat. For decades the family spent time with friends and relatives enjoying the beautiful creek vistas and serene environment of what was then the countryside outside Lafayette.

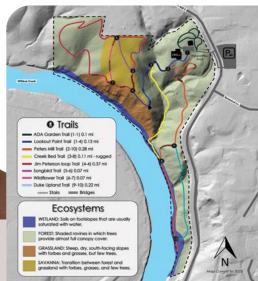
After the death of their only son, Jerry, the Cleggs decided to convert the private garden into a memorial garden in Jerry's honor. On April 18, 1965, the Clegg family opened the property to the public under the auspices of the Clegg Foundation. Newly installed trails enabled the public to explore the hills and access Wildcat Creek.

Jim Peterson was caretaker of Clegg Memorial Garden from 1966 to 2013. He and his family lived on site for nearly 50 years, tending the land, building trails, and helping the community connect with nature through projects like tree and plant ID signs. Jim also led the shift from a formal garden to a native landscape, restoring prairie and savanna habitats along Wildcat Creek. The Peterson family's lasting impact helped make Clegg a beloved place in the community for

experiencing nature.

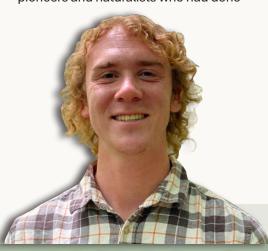
Pictured: Jim Peterson (left) Jerry Clegg (right). Thanks to the ongoing dedication of our volunteer trail crew, Clegg Memorial Garden features one of the most extensive trail systems maintained by NICHES. Visitors can explore over a mile of trails that showcase a rich variety of habitats and terrain.

In the early 2010s, NICHES was steadily growing in acres, membership, volunteer participation, and reputation, while the administrative team operated out of a small office in downtown Lafayette. At the same time, Jim Peterson and the Clegg Foundation board were discussing the future as Jim neared retirement from caretaking. Jim advocated for merging the Clegg Foundation with NICHES, and after much discussion between both boards, the merger was finalized in 2014. This marked a pivotal moment for both organizations. Clegg Gardens and the legacy of Harold, Ruth, Jerry, and Jim were now permanently protected by NICHES, and the Clegg cottage was transformed from a family home into NICHES' administrative office, providing the space we needed to grow. Since then, NICHES has stewarded the habitats, maintained and expanded trails, built a natural play area for children, renovated the porch for accessibility, and more. We are proud to call this property our headquarters and to continue connecting the community to Wildcat Creek.



Expanding our Stewardship Team

I am honored to introduce myself as the newest full-time member of NICHES' stewardship team. A Hoosier since birth, I spent countless hours exploring the woods and filling my head with stories of the Native Americans, voyageurs, pioneers and naturalists who had done



the same for countless generations before me. With age and education came the realization that the landscape I lived on now had become very different from the one that those past generations had enjoyed. I began to see the damage to the landscape, the decline in wildlife, habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and realized that the responsibility fell on the current inhabitants of our state to act as stewards. After finishing my undergraduate degree at Purdue, I moved to North Carolina for a year to work on a burn crew so I could learn to return fire to the landscape. I eventually returned to my home state to work for NICHES. In my free time, I enjoy birding, fishing, and photographing insects.

-NICHES Steward, Lucas Wilson lucas@nicheslandtrust.org

30th Birthday Campaign Progress

While the organization celebrates its 30th anniversary, NICHES board and staff are still hard at work planning for a vibrant and verdant future. NICHES' 2030 Strategic Plan provides a road map that outlines in what ways we must grow to protect and manage an ever-expanding network of habitats.

2025 is an important benchmark year to celebrate how far we've come and to organize around our future growth. As of June 30, we have made considerable progress in reaching our 30th anniversary campaign goals, but we still need your support!

We hope you can help NICHES reach our "300 new members" goal by the end of 2025. You can help by inviting your friends to the Friend Drive, gifting a membership, bringing a friend to an event or volunteer day, and telling your family why you love protecting native ecosystems.



Our Community of Support

NICHES staff, board, volunteers, and community members gathered to celebrate the organization's 30th birthday at the Wright Center in Martell Forest on June 21! Before we enjoyed cake and ice cream, the organization held the 2025 Annual Meeting to elect a new board member and present the 2024 annual report to over 100 attendees.

Highlights of the Report Included:

- In 2024, NICHES added nearly 200 acres to our protected lands through six acquisition projects.
- Five of the six land acquisitions were made possible through the generosity of landowners who donated or bargain sold their land to NICHES.
- Our community contributed 12,000+ volunteer hours to the organization last year equivalent to almost 6 extra staff members!
- Bob gave an in-depth overview of the progress at Shawnee Bottoms and Potawatomi Trail following the timber management harvests (See pages 5-6 of this Sprout).
- Tippecanoe County Commissioner Tracy Brown, City of West Lafayette Mayor Erin Easter, and City of Lafayette Councilor Steve Snyder recognized NICHES' 30th Anniversary by reading a "Helping Ecosystems Thrive" Day Proclamation.

In addition to the in-person festivities, NICHES celebrated its 30th year with the annual Birthday Campaign and raised \$63,827 for our work – which doubled our original campaign goal of \$30,000! We are grateful for the generosity of our conservation community and are proud to continue to be the driving force that uplifts all of the northern Indiana citizens who are helping ecosystems survive.

Thank You to our Sponsors!



































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During our 30th anniversary celebration, we invite you to gift a membership to help grow our circle of support.

Gift Membership Recipient Information Learn more at nicheslandtrust.org/friends

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