



THE SPROUT

NICHES LAND TRUST | SPRING 2025 | VOLUME 29 ISSUE 1

2024 Reflection | 30 Years of Growth: A Seed of Change | Protecting The Howell Woods

“Bobcat at Black Rock” Cover Painting By NICHES Volunteer: *Gabriela Sineich*

“We will be known forever by the tracks we leave” - Dakota Proverb

Executive Director Update

Spring Greetings NICHES Land Trust members! I am ecstatic to celebrate NICHES's 30th birthday with all of you. To commemorate this tremendous achievement, throughout this year each edition of The Sprout will share stories of NICHES's history and growth as a land trust. This edition shares the story of NICHES' incorporation in 1995.

I've learned from our founders that a shared love for birds and wetlands brought this community together. Most NICHES early members are still involved in the organization, including founders and early board members. This dedication and generosity created all our successes, including a remarkable 2024.

In 2024, we protected nearly 200 acres of land through 6 projects; 5 of those projects included a land donation, either a full donation or a bargain sale. We are excited, grateful, and proud of each of these accomplishments for permanent protection. The generosity of the partnerships in these projects speaks volumes about this community, as does the 12,000+ volunteer hours contributed last year, and major progress accomplished restoring habitat at the nature preserves.

This year we are also hosting special events, including a history exhibition, a panel discussion, a nature art showcase,

a variety of hikes, and, of course, volunteer opportunities out in the nature preserves. Please keep an eye on our website calendar for all the dates scheduled and forthcoming. I especially hope you can join us June 21 for the annual membership meeting and birthday celebration featuring the annual report, board member election, potluck, dessert, and fun activities.

Our 30th anniversary campaign has ambitious goals and with YOUR support we can accomplish all of them! The native habitats we protect together need a broad community of support. Please help garner that support by helping NICHES reach our 300 new-member goal. Invite your friends to become NICHES members, gift a membership to a neighbor, bring a coworker to an event or volunteer day, and tell your family why you love protecting local natural areas. And, of course, please give generously.

In a recent visit I asked one of NICHES's founders Harry Potter if he had any message for the membership for our 30th anniversary. He said with a smile and twinkle in his eye, "Keep up the great work." Let's keep up the great work together.

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

2025 Annual Meeting & Board Slate

NICHES members are invited to attend the 2025 Annual Meeting on June 21. Join us at 1:00 pm at the John S. Wright Forestry Center (1007 N 725 W, West Lafayette) for the presentation of the organization's annual report and board member election. The meeting will be followed by a

potluck reception. Everyone's invited to stick around for NICHES' 30th Birthday Celebration from 2:30 – 5:00 p.m., featuring dessert and activities. Read more about our 30th Anniversary Celebration on page 14 and check the NICHES website calendar for updates.

As a member of NICHES Land Trust, you are invited to take part in the annual election of board members. If you cannot make the Annual Meeting on June 21, you can vote absentee by mailing the enclosed ballot envelope to our office. This year, we have two board members up for re-election and one member ready to serve their first term. There is room on the board for all candidates.



John Duffey
(New Board Member)

I am honored to join the NICHES Board of Directors and contribute to the important work of land protection and stewardship. Having spent nearly 40 years as a trial lawyer with a focus on property law, I believe my experience can be valuable in supporting NICHES' mission. As a resident of Tippecanoe County for over four decades, I've seen firsthand the importance of preserving our natural spaces for future generations. While retired from my role as a partner at Stuart & Branigin Law Firm in Lafayette, I continue to work part-time "Of Counsel" with Fletcher & Sippel LLC in Chicago. Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my wife, Teresa, our three adult children, and our energetic household of one dog and four cats. I'm excited to be part of such a passionate and dedicated group and look forward to helping NICHES continue its impactful work.



Kent Walters
(Returning Board Member)

Kent is a native Hoosier whose love of nature led him to earn his PhD in physiology, studying Alaskan beetles at the University of Notre Dame. Currently Kent, his husband, and his three sons live on a 5th-generation family farm in Warren County. Here Kent discovered his love for land management. Kent has been helping to manage the family cattle herd with an eye towards promoting native grassland biodiversity. He has become an advocate for native plant communities and has helped lead a prairie restoration project with NICHES at Cicott Park.

Vanessa works as the Program Manager for RE-AMP where she facilitates encounters across the Midwest that support an equitable and just climate future. Vanessa earned her M.S.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs in 2015 from Indiana University before embracing Lafayette as her home. She traditionally works with teams to set plans for working with media, running educational programs, and managing intra-group relationships. She co-founded the ACE Campus Food Pantry and the Greater Lafayette Legal Defense Fund. Vanessa currently serves as NICHES Board Vice President loves to hike the preserves with her two dogs and encounter wild mushrooms on the trails.



Vanessa Pacheco
(Returning Board Member)



Mike Bristol
(Continuing Board Member)



Jarred Brooke
(Continuing Board Member)



Brad Carlson
(Continuing Board Member)



Jill Evans
(Continuing Board Member)



John Graveel
(Continuing Board Member)



Trent Hanthorn
(Continuing Board Member)



Jenna Isch
(Continuing Board Member)



Krista Johnson
(Continuing Board Member)



Rick Johnson Sheehan
(Continuing Board Member)



Christian Knoller
(Continuing Board Member)



Mike Murr
(Continuing Board Member)



Brent Talcott
(Continuing Board Member)

30 Years of Growth: A Seed of Change

On July 29, 1994, Harry Potter, Persis Newman, and Susan Ulrich met in the Sociology Conference Room at Purdue University to compare notes and discuss what a land trust was, what it would take to start one, and whether such an organization would be useful in west-central Indiana.

The seed of this pivotal meeting had been planted several years earlier when George Parker, a professor in the Purdue Forestry Department, asked Susan Ulrich if the Sycamore Audubon Society Chapter had ever considered becoming a land trust. (They had not.)

Providently, in 1993, Gerda Kohnke and son Peter, asked the Audubon Society to accept a conservation easement on the Kohnkes' forested Little Pine Valley property in Warren County. The family loved the property and wanted to preserve it. However, the Audubon Society was not set up to handle conservation easements – a function usually served by a land trust. Regardless, Audubon members supported the idea and agreed to accept the easement since there was not yet an organization which could protect the land.

Then in 1994, Wal-Mart announced it would be building a store adjacent to the recently proposed Celery Bog Wetland Park. This park had stirred a lot of positive interest in West Lafayette,

and the arrival of Wal-Mart was greeted with dismay and led to a number of community meetings.



Concern for the protection of West Lafayette's Celery Bog Nature Area was a major catalyst in NICHES Land Trust's founding.

It was obvious at those meetings there were people and landowners who wanted to permanently protect open space but had no way to do so or a group to work with. Susan Ulrich asked the question George Parker had asked earlier: had anyone thought about starting a land trust? Harry and Persis immediately volunteered to form a committee, and thus the July 1994 meeting. After that first get-together, the three expanded the committee by inviting others with an interest in land protection to join them at additional meetings that included representatives of Sycamore, Central Indiana, and ACRES Land Trusts. These meetings inspired the local group by giving them a chance to see what a local land trust could become.

The Sycamore Audubon Society (SAS) used their March 1995 Conservation Program to promote the idea of starting a land trust. The meeting was publicized and a sign-up sheet passed around. Meetings were held to write bylaws. The name "NICHES" came from Harry Potter and seemed appropriate since the group hoped to save a niche here and a niche there to preserve some of the wonderful biodiversity of this area. Bob Bauman, a local attorney, handled incorporation pro bono and his firm helped with the 501(c) 3 filing. NICHES needed \$450 to cover the fee charged by the IRS. SAS stepped up and raised the money at a bake sale. Thanks to the IRS's surprisingly quick approval, NICHES was up and running as a not-for-profit by October 1995. The official "come out" and announcement of NICHES existence was delayed until Earth Day in 1996.

What has happened since then has been incredibly rewarding. Landowners looking for options to protect their land have donated or willed properties to NICHES. People wanting to protect habitat but who had no way to work towards this goal previously, joined and contributed funds and volunteer time. By the end of 1996 NICHES had 56 members along with two donated properties totaling 24 acres. 30 years since incorporation NICHES now has 1,000+ members, manages nearly 5,000 acres of

land (including lands from 30+ donations), has a 7-person staff, is an accredited land trust, and is viewed as the regional leader in the stewardship of natural areas. This success has come from the determination and commitment of the community, believing that lasting protection for natural areas means never giving up. From small beginnings great things have emerged and the future of NICHES looks better and brighter than ever.

Join our 30th Anniversary Celebration!

NICHES Land Trust is excited to celebrate three decades of protecting, restoring, and sustaining native habitats. As we continue growing towards our goal of stewarding 8,000 acres by 2030, we hope you'll consider contributing to the 30th Anniversary campaign. We need your support and enthusiasm. Be sure to subscribe to our Acorn e-newsletter so you can stay informed about all the fun events and programs we have in the works to commemorate this year. The future is bright for local conservation.

30th Anniversary Campaign Goals:

- \$300,000 Dollars Raised from individuals
- 300 New Members
- 30 gifts of \$3,000+

Protecting The Howell Woods

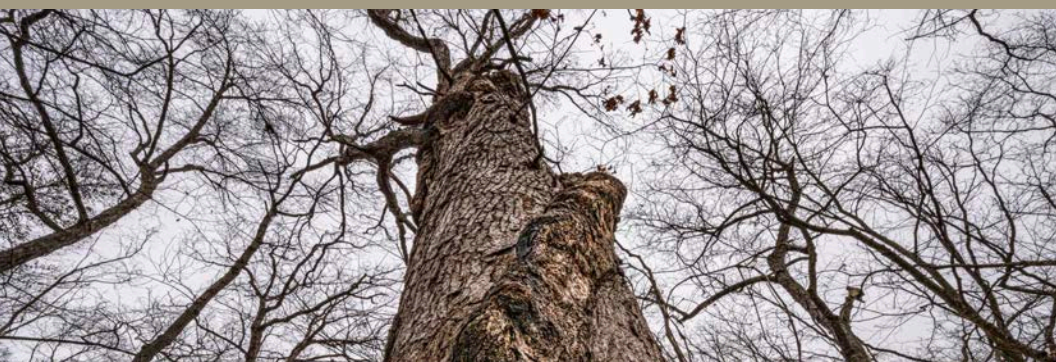
In September 2024, NICHES Land Trust acquired 28 acres of oak woodland in Tippecanoe County named "The Howell Woods." These woods are home to some of the oldest oak, hickory, and walnut trees in Tippecanoe County and 0.4 miles of upper Little Pine Creek. These features and The Howell Woods' proximity to NICHES' Mulvey Pond nature preserve made this a priority project within our land and water protection strategic goals. The new property is located on 231N, just north of US 52, and is separated from Mulvey Pond by only one parcel to the west. While not contiguous, we celebrate this acquisition as an expansion of the protected area at Mulvey Pond.

The herbaceous flora and native shrub components have good remnant quality and will be improved with NICHES's management. Indicator species of intact mesic oak woodland cover the herbaceous layer, including purple node Joe-Pye weed, false Solomon's seal, several *Carex* species, common wood reed, some of the fall blooming asters, honeysuckle, and jack-in-the-pulpit. Historic fish sampling documented the grass pickerel, redbelly darter, golden shiner, black bullhead,

Green and Longear Sunfish and other fishes in this section of Little Pine Creek from nearby sampling sites (Fisher et al 1998).

It was easy to imagine a sorrowful fate for the large trees and creek frontage given the ever-expanding urban development in our headquarter county. Land prices have risen dramatically in west central Indiana, making the conservation work we do increasingly difficult to afford. Thankfully, generous individuals and foundations are dedicated to protecting beloved local natural areas. NICHES is especially grateful to Joan and Philip Low, the Whistler Foundation, The McAllister Foundation, and the Laura Hare Charitable Trust for funding this purchase and to the Howell Family for choosing to sell to NICHES.

This winter we installed a small parking area with in-kind support from Premier Services and mowed invasive shrubs with in-kind support from Arbor America. NICHES' stewardship team is diligently completing the follow up treatment. Signage and a trail named for Dr. Laura Hare are in progress for this new preserve to be enjoyed for generations to come.



A towering, centuries-old white oak now enjoys permanent protection thanks to NICHES' acquisition of The Howell Woods. (Photo by Chad Phelps).



These weathered giants tell the story of The Howell Woods, now preserved for generations to come.

Photo by: Chad Phelps



Welcome to the Team Kendall

Hello, and nice to meet you! My name is Kendall, and I'm the Spring Development Intern for NICHES. I grew up around Columbus, Ohio, and I'm currently a third-year student at Purdue University. At Purdue, I have two fields of study: Professional Writing and Natural Resources & Environmental Science (NRES). I also have a minor in Classical Studies for all my fellow ancient Greek and Roman literature enthusiasts out there.

I first heard about NICHES through one of my professors, Dr. Rick Johnson-Sheehan. He had mentioned how much he admired the work that NICHES was doing and that he loved serving on the Board of Directors. He made a pretty compelling case, and I was hooked immediately. As an NRES major, I have always been passionate about conservation and restoration, and I'm even more passionate writing about it! I wanted to be part of the NICHES team so I could get the community more involved in all they have to offer.

At NICHES, my job is to manage social media accounts to highlight NICHES properties, to market and plan events, to assist with miscellaneous communication projects, and to write blog posts (see 'Mindfulness Hike: Rest' on NICHES' website!). I'm thankful for the opportunity to work with NICHES so I can gain professional experience and expand my writing portfolio.

In the future, I hope to go into science communication or grant writing for a large nonprofit so I can continue promoting

conservation efforts. I am most excited for the upcoming "War of the Weeds" event! The event is held annually and occurs over a period of several weeks. Throughout War of the Weeds, volunteers sign up for 3-hour shifts to remove garlic mustard from NICHES properties. Garlic mustard is an invasive species that directly competes with spring ephemeral flowers, so it is important to remove it annually to improve the habitat for NICHES' beautiful wildflowers.

I'm thankful to NICHES for the opportunity to work with them this semester, and I'm excited to help get the community involved as best as I can!

***-NICHES Spring Development Intern,
Kendall Amodeo***



Mark Your Calendars

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

APRIL

War of the Weeds

**Every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
between April 11th and May 11th
(Shift 1: 10 am - 1 pm, Shift 2: 1 pm - 4 pm)**

Volunteer shifts to pull garlic mustard, an invasive species, across NICHES preserves. Great activity for all ages. Volunteer for 2+ shifts to receive this year's garlic mustard ID bandanna for free. See NICHES website calendar for more details.

Earth Day Poetry Hike

**April 19th- Hike @ Berkshire Tarnowski
Forest Preserve
(2:00 pm - 4:00 pm)**

Celebrate Earth Day with a hike along Deer Creek. Attendees are welcome to bring poems to share.

Frog Song Event

**April 12th- Hike @ NICHES Warren Piece
Conservation Easement
(9:00 pm - 10:30 pm)**

Explore the hidden world of amphibians as we enjoy a night walk through forest and wetland habitat in search of one of Indiana's smallest frogs, the spring peeper!

"Renewal" Mindfulness Hike

**April 27th- Hike @ Williams Woods
(2:00 pm - 4:00 pm)**

NICHES Land Trust is excited to announce a new, quarterly Mindfulness Hike Series, presented in partnership with A Work in Progress Faith Community and Heart & Soul Farm. Our Spring "Renewal" Hike will focus on ephemeral wildflowers and will feature a presentation from local botanist Dan Childs. This event is free, but registration is required.

MAY

Mulvey Pond Herp Hike

**May 21st @ Mulvey Pond
(8:00 pm start)**

Ever wonder what makes those strange sounds around ponds in spring? It's most likely a frog or toad! Join Purdue Professor Jason Hoverman for a nighttime activity exploring these amazing amphibian species as they begin their breeding season. See NICHES website calendar to register and for more details.

Native Plant Fest

May 10th @ Ross Camp (11:00 am - 6:00 pm)

Join the Tippecanoe Soil and Water Conservation District for this free event featuring a plant sale, hikes, presentations, prizes and more! For more information visit www.tippecanoe-county-swcd.org.

JUNE

NICHES Annual Meeting

**June 21st @ Wright Forestry Center,
West Lafayette 1:00 pm**

Join us for our Annual Membership Meeting and Birthday Celebration! We will vote on new board members, present 2024 financials, and share organizational updates.

JULY

Electrofishing Event

**June 19th @ Martell Forest
(11:00 am - 1:00 pm)**

Explore stream health and biodiversity through hands-on activities like electrofishing and species sampling. Registration is required.

Looking Back at 2024

A month to month recap of stewardship, volunteering, and outreach highlights.

January: On January 15, NICHES volunteers weathered the cold temperatures and gathered at NICHES Granville Sand Barrens Preserve for our first volunteer workday of the year. Stewardship tasks included dragging, stacking, and burning previously cut brush. This will allow the area to better recover as open sand barrens habitat.



February: On February 29 and March 1, NICHES Stewardship Staff attended a SAWW (Safety and Woods Worker Training) program at the Warbler Ridge Conservation area in Charleston, IL. This training was focused on safe chainsaw handling and use procedures. Training opportunities like this help ensure that our staff stay safe and up to date on the best landscape management practices.

March: With the help of volunteers and local conservation partners, NICHES conducted 9 controlled burns in the late winter / early spring of 2024, totaling 527.5 acres. This was the second most productive burn season in terms of acres covered in NICHES history. In total, NICHES has conducted 140 prescribed fires between the spring of 2014 and the spring of 2024, covering a combined 4,935 acres! Important goals of these fires include restoring native habitats, promoting biodiversity, managing invasive species, and maintaining the health of fire-adapted ecosystems.



April: On April 19th, NICHES Land Trust launched its 5th annual "War of the Weeds" garlic mustard removal initiative. This year's program featured 32 volunteer shifts across NICHES' service area, engaging over 400 dedicated volunteers. Volunteers independently led more than 60% of these shifts, enabling NICHES staff to dedicate time to other critical spring stewardship activities.



May: On May 24th, NICHES Land Trust re-opened our Fall Creek Gorge Nature Preserve in Warren County. Over the past two years, NICHES staff and volunteers have worked to expand parking, to design and install signage, and to develop 1.5 miles of new trails for the public to enjoy. During the preserve's closure, the stewardship team also coordinated extensive invasive species removal efforts and conducted multiple prescribed burns to support habitat restoration.

June: Between June 3 - 21 NICHES hosted 3 sessions of Summer Adventure Camp for local children aged 11-14 years old. Activities included electrofishing, fire making, atlatl throwing, tree climbing, glass bead making, shelter building, canoeing, water coloring, camera trapping, pizza making and more! NICHES was excited to welcome back graduate camper Cora Atkinson as a Jr Counselor this year. In addition to bringing her passion and excitement to camp, Cora also organized and led several art activities.



July: On July 2nd and 16th NICHES partnered with Camp Tecumseh to host 2 volunteer workdays for their 'Campers in Leadership Training' (CILT's) program. The service projects were focused on pulling invasive species at our Spring Creek Sanctuary and Frogs' Glory Preserves. This is the fourth consecutive year that the CILT program has returned to these sites to help maintain the work of past campers!

On July 11th, NICHES partnered with the Benton County Soil & Water Conservation District, The Nature Conservancy, Geswein Farm & Land Realty, LLC, Urban Soil Health, and Purdue Agronomy to host a group from Family Matters Chicago for a field day focused on understanding and protecting our natural resources.

August: On Friday August 30th, NICHES hosted a cleanup of Wildcat Creek with volunteers from Caterpillar Lafayette! This is the third year in a row that Caterpillar volunteers have returned to remove trash between NICHES Peter's Mill Access Point and Davis Ferry on the Wabash River. In addition to removing 16 tires and 1,000+ pounds of trash, the volunteer crew also helped cut out log jams using hand tools. With 24 volunteers attending, this was also NICHES largest creek cleanup crew in our organization's history!



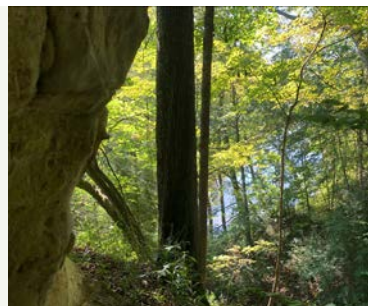
September: In September, NICHES installed new signage at several nature preserves in Fountain and Warren counties. These signs serve as a welcome to visitors while offering deeper insights into the rich cultural and biological history of each location. They also emphasize how everyone can contribute to preserving these vital ecosystems, fostering a stronger connection between the community and the land.

October: Between October 25-27, NICHES hosted its 5th Annual Jack-o-Lantern Hike at Clegg Memorial Garden, with over 900 hikers voting on 296 jack-o-lantern entries. Thanks to the creativity and support of volunteers, carvers, and attendees, the event raised over \$4,000 for local conservation efforts.



November: In November, NICHES Deer Cull Volunteers harvested a total of 168 deer, including 117 does, 45 bucks, and 6 button bucks. This marks our most successful season to date in terms of harvest numbers, achieving an impressive 2.29 doe-to-buck ratio.

December: In December, we reflected on an extremely productive year for land acquisition. 2024 acquisitions include an addition to Williams Woods (126 ac - Warren County), Spring Creek Forest (13 ac- White County), Goose & Gander Island (1.5 ac - Carroll County), The Howell Woods (27 ac- Tippecanoe County), and Sugar Creek Woods (19 ac-Montgomery County).



A Community of Support

We are thankful for the support of the many individuals who donated gifts in 2024 in honor or in memory of following community members:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| -Delano Arvin | -Begum Majeeda | -Eric Phelps |
| -Daniel E. Bacone | Khawaja | -Aaron Schaler |
| -Pete Barker | -Abdulhaq Khawaja | -Mark Andrew Smith |
| -Mary Furlong Leppold | -Noman Khawaja | -Betty M Suddarth |
| -Mohammad Saeed | -Shakut Khawaja | -JoAnn Swintek |
| Ghafoor, Sr. | -Carter Douglas Kiser | -Jim Tarnowski |
| -Begum Saeed Ghafoor | -Martha Lyerly | -Ted Ulrich |
| -Hajji Mohammad | -Col and Mrs. CJ Martin | -Mary Wheeler Weeks |
| Ghafoor | -Marilyn Moore | -Arthur and Wilma Weigle |
| -Brad Grenard | -James Peterson | -Rick Westerman |

Thank You to our Sponsors!



*Candor Payroll, Driggs & Associates, Isch Insurance Agency,
The National Group, Edward Jones - Elliot Hartje, Lafayette
Noon Optimists, Purdue Federal Credit Union, Sound Advice.*

For more information on sponsorships, contact our Development Director,
Ann Fields Monical at ann@nicheslandtrust.org or call 765-423-1605.

Gift a Membership

We believe a group of friends can do a lot of good. Gift a membership, and help grow our community of support for Nature. Help us reach our goal of 300 new members!

Gift Recipient Information

First and Last Name _____
E-Mail _____
Telephone _____
Mailing Address _____

Donor Information

Your First and Last Name _____
E-Mail _____
Telephone _____
Gift Amount: ☐ \$40 ☐ Other: _____

Message to Recipient (optional)

Please detach and return using the remittance envelope included in this issue of The Sprout!

