



THE SPROUT

NICHES LAND TRUST | WINTER 2025 | VOLUME 29 ISSUE 4

Sea Lilly Seeps Acquisition | An Evening With Our Founders | AmeriCorps NCCC Program

Sandhill Crane at Mulvey Pond: Gabriela Sincich

"In Nature's economy the currency is not money, it is life." -Vandana Shiva

Executive Director Update

Thank you all for making this year's celebration of NICHES's 30th Anniversary so joyous and memorable! This milestone has been marked by increased outreach events, inspiring stories of our growth, exciting new land acquisitions, and extraordinary generosity. Record participation at these gatherings has shown how deeply our community values nature. It has been wonderful to celebrate, explore the outdoors, and learn together with so many dedicated supporters.

Throughout the year, long-time members, conservation partners, and our land trust peers have shared heartfelt praise for NICHES's leadership in land stewardship and protection. Hearing from our founders during the "Seeds of Change" panel and the Black Rock Society Dinner this September was especially meaningful. Their reflections affirmed how far we've come and how strong our foundation remains.

As we reflect on another quarter of conservation successes in this edition of The Sprout, we are assured that NICHES is on the right path, steadily bringing our long-term vision for the future to life. That vision is of a region where:

- There are large, connected areas of critical terrestrial and aquatic

habitat, in which sustainable populations of native species thrive;

- Local communities are integrated into ecologically sustainable, aesthetically appealing landscapes offering many opportunities for enjoyment of natural areas and open space;
- Local communities have found ways to minimize negative human impacts on local ecological processes and take advantage of local environmental resources in a sustainable manner thereby improving region's quality of life; and,
- Multiple and diverse stakeholders from local communities are engaged in protection, restoration, and stewardship of the landscape in an open and participatory manner.

NICHES's future is so bright. And it's made brighter by all of you. Together, let's carry the momentum of our 30th anniversary forward and close out the year with record-breaking support and enthusiasm for natural area protection across West Central Indiana.

*-NICHES Executive Director,
Shannon Stanis*

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Sea Lilly Seeps Acquisition

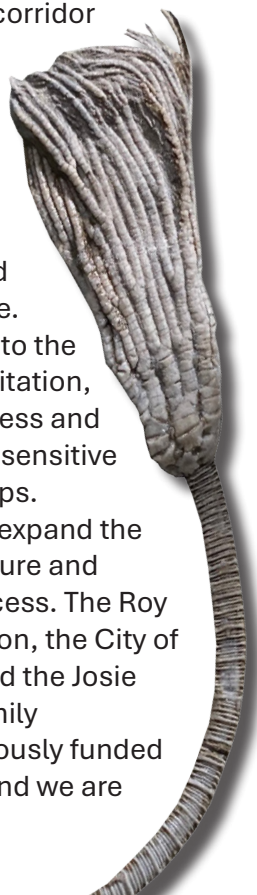
NICHES acquired 13 acres of land along Sugar Creek in Montgomery County on March 31, 2025. The new preserve is named “Sea Lily Seeps” (SLS) to reflect the rich deposits of crinoid fossils in the locality and the unique seepage wetlands at the site. Crinoids are ancient marine animals. Adults formed a stalk that attached to the sea floor, and the fossilized remains of this stalk resemble plants, which gives crinoids the common name of Sea Lily.

SLS has an established diverse population of native plants. Spring ephemeral wildflowers include phlox, false rue anemone, geraniums, trilliums, may apples, and skunk cabbage among others; quality native flowering shrubs, ferns, and sedge/grass components can be found throughout. Large sycamore trees and walnuts make up the canopy, providing habitat for plenty of birds.

This is a special acquisition part of NICHES’ 30th anniversary celebration. SLS is only a few parcels down Sugar Creek from NICHES’ 35-acre Walnut Fork Nature Reserve (WFNP). WFNP was donated by the City of Crawfordsville in 1999 when NICHES was a budding young organization. WFNP protects Sugar Creek frontage, woods, and prairie restoration. This early donation of

land helped NICHES grow in experience and reputation. Twenty-three years later, the Mayor of Crawfordsville Todd Barton called NICHES about protecting the acres that would eventually become SLS. The city wanted to see the acres protected for the community, especially as part of their wonderful series of Nature Parks; however, it did not have the capacity to pursue the acquisition at the time. Given our positive relationship with Crawfordsville and the property’s rich biodiversity within our Sugar Creek protection corridor and proximity to WFNP, NICHES was happy to help protect the site.

Sea Lily Seeps is protected as a nature reserve. It will not be open to the public daily for visitation, due to limited access and trail potential and sensitive species in the seeps. NICHES hopes to expand the preserve in the future and provide public access. The Roy Whistler Foundation, the City of Crawfordsville, and the Josie and Geoff Fox Family Foundation generously funded this acquisition, and we are grateful for their partnership.



An Evening With Our Founders

On September 18, 2025, NICHES hosted a panel event with seven founding and early board members. Susan Ulrich (first President), Mike Dana (first Vice President), Greg Shaner, George Parker, Ted Harris (second President), Wally Morrison, and Jim McGlone joined us to share their stories about NICHES early history. The discussion focused on the period of the early 1990s through 2007, which covered topics about conservation in Indiana around our formation in 1994/95 through the hiring of NICHES' first Executive Director.

The panelists shared stories about early board and committee activities, land acquisition, stewardship, and member recruitment. The founders ensured to have board representation from multiple counties in our service area and had meetings wherever someone had a connection for a free space. There were pitch-ins and bake sales to raise funds, and land acquisition projects were key fundraising efforts to bring in new members. Tons of trash were removed from the woods and it was planted with seeds for future generations. The details were interesting, but the powerful take away from the panel is that NICHES' success today came from the dedication, cooperation, and vision of our founders.

The early board was clearly dedicated: they served for years and freely gave their talents and substantial time. They worked well together to protect land through NICHES. Each of them complimented the hard work and unique skill sets of all the board and committee members. They spoke about how so many people stepped forward to help organizational development and land acquisition. They also had great fun throughout the process. The panelists

laughed and smiled as they shared stories of one another and the old days—even the one prescribed fire that got away. The early board also had a vision for a vibrant future with protected lands and wildlife corridors, with our continuing focus on the Wabash River.

Throughout our 30 years, the right person came along at the right time for the right reason to move NICHES forward. Each board member had an important skill to share and shared generously. Each landowner and land acquisition presented an opportunity to protect a unique natural area and share what makes West Central Indiana so special.

We are grateful to the panelists for sharing their stories to archive this important organizational history. The event was recorded and will be made available for online viewing at a later date.

We dearly missed our early board members who could not attend the panel, especially our de-voted founders Harry Potter, Susan Horn, Polly Honor, Don Bickel, Rod Evans, Brian Tunis, and Persis Newman. Harry, Susan H, and Polly have moved out of state and Don, Rod, Brian, and Persis have passed away. Their lasting contributions to NICHES are sensed in every protected spring wildflower, summer bird song, autumn leaf changing color, and frozen winter creek bed.

While putting together this article, we realized that NICHES could use more quality, labeled photos from our earlier years, especially those featuring people. Help us preserve our history by sharing your photos with us at niches@nicheslandtrust.org.



Left to Right: Jim and Marilyn Anderson (30+ year supporters) and Harry Potter (founder) enjoying a 2008 NICHES gathering.



Gladys & Al Wright at the dedication of the donated 80-acre Rock Creek Nature Preserve in 2001.



Photo of Susan Ulrich (founder) at her 84-acre property from a 1994 newspaper article about the start of NICHES Land Trust. Property sign created by her husband, Ted Ulrich.



Harry Potter (founder) and Ted Harris (2nd President) laughing during a 2010 NICHES party.



Susan Ulrich (founder) assisting with a 2004 prescribed fire at Weiler Leopold.



Left to Right: Mike Dana, Greg Shaner, George Parker, Jim McGlone, Wally Morrison, Susan Ulrich, Ted Harris, Shannon Stanis, & Bill Arthur speaking at NICHES 30th Anniversary Panel Event.

AmeriCorps NCCC Program

The AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) is a full-time, residential, national service program whose mission is to strengthen communities and develop leadership skills through direct, team-based national and community service. Each year hundreds of young adults, ages 18-26, serve for ten months as AmeriCorps NCCC members on teams of 6-12 people. Since 2020, NICHES has partnered with Camp Tecumseh in Brookston to jointly apply for and host these teams, bringing valuable support to special or time-dependent stewardship projects across our service region. Over the years NICHES and Camp Tecumseh have hosted 6 service teams, and in 2024 we expanded our partnership to include the Wabash & Erie Canal Park in Delphi.

Each NCCC team brings the capacity to take on large-scale stewardship projects that would be difficult to complete with weekend volunteer crews alone. By serving during key seasons like early spring and fall, teams also help free up staff capacity during critical times when other priorities, such as prescribed fire planning and fall invasive species control, demand attention. Over the years, teams have

contributed to a wide range of projects including trail construction, shrub thicket plantings, trash removal, and burn break preparation.

Beyond the visible impact made on the landscape, the AmeriCorps NCCC program offers meaningful benefits such as the exchange of stewardship and natural literacy skills with team members as well as fostering partnerships that expand conservation beyond NICHES-owned properties. Several NCCC team members have gone on to pursue other jobs and opportunities in conservation across the country with full-throated support and recommendation from NICHES. Next fall, Camp Tecumseh plans to conduct its first prescribed fire on the 600+ acres it protects after years of preparation from NCCC teams and guidance from our Stewardship Staff.

We are deeply grateful to every AmeriCorps NCCC team that has served with us. Their hard work, passion, and dedication to something larger than themselves continues to inspire our mission and serves as a powerful reminder of the values that guided the founding of NICHES 30 years ago.



Spring 2020 "Oak 3" 9-person team
Contributed 1,440 service hours



Fall 2020 "Cedar 3" 6-person team
Contributed 720 service hours



Spring 2021 "Oak 5" 9-person team
Contributed 1,600 service hours



Spring 2023 "Aspen 1" 8-person team
Contributed 1,280 service hours



Spring 2025 "Cedar 5" 9-person team
Contributed 450 service hours



Summer 2025 "Oak 2" 9-person team
Contributed 970 service hours

Zeigler Subaru Shares the Love

NICHES Land Trust is proud to be a Subaru Hometown Charity partner. Subaru and our local dealership, Zeigler Subaru, have 'Shared the Love' with our nonprofit for the past 9 years! In addition to their generous corporate sponsorship, Zeigler Subaru in Lafayette has been an outstanding conservation partner. Subaru and Zeigler Subaru and its employees are enthusiastic supporters of NICHES Land Trust's mission to protect, restore, and sustain nearly 5,000 acres of natural areas.

Zeigler Subaru has been a fantastic partner for our volunteer program for nearly a decade. Zeigler's management team and employees enthusiastically support the environment by helping remove invasive species and maintaining trails at our nature preserves that are open to the public year-round. NICHES Land Trust is grateful for Subaru and Zeigler's commitment to fulfilling their "Love the Earth Promise."



NICHES Land Trust is delighted to once again be one of two "Hometown" charities selected for Subaru's Share the Love Event! For every new Subaru vehicle purchased or leased between November 20, 2025, through January 2, 2026, Subaru of America donates \$250 to the customer's choice of charity. Last year, this event raised \$14,000 for NICHES! Please tell your friends and family to select NICHES when they buy or lease their Subaru during Share the Love!

"NICHES gives our team the chance to step outside of the retailer and not only practice teamwork but also connect with nature. It reflects exactly what Subaru stands for—caring for the earth—while contributing to restoration efforts and helping create a beautiful environment for the Greater Lafayette community."

– Zeigler employee

"I enjoy volunteering for NICHES Land Trust because it allows me to give back to the environment in a meaningful way. Being outdoors, helping restore and protect native habitats, and working alongside a passionate community gives me a sense of purpose and connection. It's rewarding to know that my efforts contribute to preserving natural spaces for future generations."

– Jordan S.

"Growing up, I used to take time with my family going down to Turkey Run. We enjoyed hiking on the trails and spending time outdoors. But as a kid, it seemed like the drive took forever. At Zeigler Subaru, when we started actively volunteering with NICHES I learned just how much land they had preserved locally. All over the region, but so much here in Tippecanoe County. So, for me, I felt a strong urge to support them in keeping up the trails and property. Giving people local options to get outside and discover nature."

– Josh H.





Each autumn, NICHES preserves unveil nature's 'Greatest Show on Earth,' as the landscape transforms under a canopy of changing colors. *(Photograph by: Chad Phelps)*



Quarterly Highlights

On August 9th, volunteers helped clean up a 4.5-mile stretch of Wildcat Creek from Peter's Mill to Davis Ferry. Together, we removed 16 tires and a truck bed full of trash from the creek. For the past 7 years, NICHES has worked with the local community to clean up Wildcat Creek and other local waterways. Over time, we've seen fewer new items and more older debris, which suggests that less trash is being added and we are now uncovering items that have been buried for a long time. On this float, we removed several vintage whitewall tires from the 60's - 80's and a pre-Prohibition Thieme & Wagner Brewery beer bottle that was made here in Lafayette!



On August 19th, the eastern box turtle eggs at our Clegg Memorial Garden Headquarters finally hatched! In June, NICHES Summer Adventure Campers were fortunate to watch as the nest was dug and six eggs were laid. After exactly 9 weeks, 2 days, and 7 hours of incubation, all the baby turtles emerged sporting shells no bigger than quarters! Thank you to NICHES friends, volunteers, and supporters for helping us protect local habitat and making special moments like this possible.

On August 22nd, NICHES friends and supporters gathered at our Kickapoo Cliffs Preserve in Warren County to celebrate the grand opening of our new Stewardship Facility. Designed by NICHES staff, the 6,000 sq. ft. building features customized storage for equipment, seed, and other land stewardship supplies. The facility also enhances our ability to maintain hiking trails and host outreach events that connect the community with local natural areas.



On August 23rd, NICHES members joined retired Purdue entomologist Tom Turpin for a presentation exploring the life, work, and legacy of one of Indiana's most influential naturalists, Gene Stratton-Porter. The program highlighted Stratton-Porter's 1912 book *Moths of the Limberlost*, which chronicles her observations of the moths inhabiting Indiana's Limberlost Swamp. After the presentation, attendees had the opportunity to explore some of the insect life that can be found thriving at Clegg Memorial Garden.

On August 30th, NICHES members and friends gathered at our Crow's Grove Preserve in Warren County for our third and final Summer Creek Hike with NICHES Stewardship Director Bob Easter. Thank you to everyone who came out this summer to cool off and learn about the unique aquatic ecosystems that NICHES protects for future generations to cherish and enjoy!



On September 27th, NICHES hosted its annual Black Rock Society Dinner at the Wabash and Erie Canal Interpretive Center in Delphi. Members of our Black Rock Society have donated land, included NICHES in their estate plan, or given a sizeable gift annually or over their lifetime.

On September 19th, NICHES hosted its fourth annual Wildcat Creek Cleanup with employees from Caterpillar Lafayette, focusing on a 2+ mile stretch between Wildcat Creek Park and NICHES' Peter's Mill Access Point. A week later, on September 26th, NICHES partnered with employees from Tipmont REMC for another cleanup event upstream. In total, community members helped remove trash along more than 13 miles of Wildcat Creek, from NICHES' Mi-So-Lah Access Point all the way to the Wabash River. Efforts like these help keep Indiana's longest scenic creek clean, healthy, and safe for everyone to enjoy.



On September 28th, NICHES partnered with Work in Progress Faith Community to host our fourth quarterly Mindfulness Hike of the year. Held at Fall Creek Gorge Nature Preserve in Warren County, the hike centered on the theme "The Wisdom of Trees" and featured a special presentation from retired Purdue Forestry Professor Bill Hoover.

In celebration of 30 years of land protection, NICHES invited community members to share artworks inspired by their favorite natural places. The resulting exhibit, Found My Niche, features 15 local artists and is now on view at Stalph (110 E. Lafayette St., Pine Village) through October 30. Stop by during open hours (Tues-Sat, 9 am-4 pm) to enjoy the art and cast your vote for the People's Choice Award!



Rare Discoveries in Familiar Places

One of the most rewarding experiences as a land steward is encountering wildlife while working on the preserves, especially rare species with unique habitat requirements. These encounters indicate to us that we are on the right track with the management we are implementing and that we are working in natural areas which retain function through the web of life.

We often work with wildlife researchers to gain a better understanding of the species using NICHES preserves and to actively monitor all types of wildlife from mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, all the way down to insects which all play roles in the ecology of our natural areas.

This year while completing site inspections and easement monitoring, I put a special focus on documenting bird species. I photographed Trumpeter Swans including a cygnet at our Cranberry Marsh conservation easement in Warren County. I also used the Merlin Bird ID app to record bird calls during every inspection and turned up many interesting species including the state-endangered Henslow's Sparrow at our Farris Estate preserve.



(Photo: Bob Easter)

Cranberry Marsh's 80+ acres of open water provide vital habitat for a variety of resident and migratory waterfowl, including this family of Trumpeter Swans.

Last year, Zach Neff saw multiple slender glass lizards at the Farris Estate while completing stewardship and I encouraged him to report the sightings to Indiana state herpetologist, Nate Engbrecht, who was working on a statewide assessment of the species. After DNR review, which included NICHES observations, the slender glass lizard was listed by the state as a species of special concern. Later in 2024, Justin and Zach spotted another rare grassland species at Farris: a state-endangered ornate box turtle, which was confirmed and documented in coordination with Nate.



Protected grasslands at NICHES' 400-acre Farris Estate Preserve provide refuge for rare species like slender glass lizards (left) and state-endangered ornate box turtles (right).

NICHES protects a population of ornate box turtles at our Granville Sand Barrens preserve in Tippecanoe County where we also see six-lined racerunners and state-endangered plains leopard frogs. The presence of these species in the Granville area, along with historical documentation of prairie habitat, were part of the decision-making process to restore 140-acres of prairie vegetation in 2024 to the retired agricultural fields at the adjacent Laura Hare Bend of the

Wabash East preserve. Throughout 2025 we have photographed plains leopard frogs foraging in the second-year prairie restoration. This evidence confirms we have doubled usable habitat in the area for this special frog.

Lucas Wilson, our newest full-time land steward and graduate of the Purdue FNR Wildlife program, has also spotted two occurrences of the uncommon smooth earth snake on different NICHES preserves this year. This species is restricted to rocky, dry, steep slopes and likely occurs on multiple NICHES preserves.

We recently worked with Midwest Biological Survey and Northland Environmental Services to have Nathanael Pilla and Jim Bess complete vascular plant and insect bio-inventories at our Farris Estate property. Jim documented over 200 insect species including several state-listed species. This spring Jim reached out to let us know that he had confirmed emergence of a *Schinia lucens* moth from pupae collected from a leadplant at Farris. He indicated that it took him 30 years to find this moth in Indiana and that it is only the second known record of the species in the state.

He said we have the best population of this state-endangered species in the Midwest, outside of Minnesota. Another insect species that Jim documented at Farris, state-threatened *Hadena ectypa* was later found as a caterpillar by Zach at Holley Savanna. Working with Jim has us looking closer at caterpillars and learning more about host plant species which are essential for movement from one life stage to the next for our wild insects.



(Photos: Jim Bess)

Hadena ectypa caterpillar, a state-threatened moth species documented at NICHES' Holley Savanna Preserve.

All this coordination with researchers and partners keeps us learning, in-tune with our surroundings, and understanding when a sighting is significant. Listening to the places you are managing should inform your stewardship, rather than predetermined prescriptions based on broad structural components or oversimplified approaches which may be widely accepted but based on limited understanding of their impacts. We are always looking to understand more and do better in caring for our preserves, and this is just one example of how we as land stewards with NICHES listen more and react in good measure.



(Photos: Jim Bess)

A *Schinia lucens* moth, one of only two known records of this state-endangered moth in Indiana, documented at Farris Estate Preserve.

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

Triple Your Support On Giving Tuesday

On a crisp morning, when frost sparkles on the prairie grass and the sun rises slowly through bare tree branches, it's easy to be reminded of how much nature gives us.

Quiet moments on a trail, the joy of spotting wildlife, or the comfort of knowing that wild places will still be here for future generations. All of these are gifts the land offers freely.

At NICHES Land Trust, we believe in returning that gift by protecting and caring for our forests, wetlands, prairies, and streams. This work is only possible because of people like you, who understand that conservation is not just about land—it's about community, connection, and legacy.

This season, your gift can go three times as far to protect the places you love. Several generous supporters have pledged a total of

\$60,000 in matching funds to inspire others to give. That means every dollar you donate will be matched with two dollars, tripling your impact to protect native habitats, defend against invasive species, and connect people with nature. Together, we can make an even greater difference for the lands and waters that sustain us all.

Join NICHES in giving back to the land that sustains us. Your gift will help restore fragile habitats, expand public access to natural areas, and safeguard rare and beautiful places across our region. Special thanks to the private donors for the matching funds and to NIPSCO and NiSource Charitable Foundation for sponsoring the campaign."

***-NICHES Board President,
Trent Hanthorn***



You can learn more and join our Giving Tuesday campaign at nicheslandtrust.org/give.



Meet Our Team and Partners

The mission of NICHES Land Trust is to protect, restore and sustain Northern Indiana's ecosystems by providing habitat for native species and offering natural places for the education, appreciation, and enjoyment of current and future generations.

NICHES Staff

Shannon Stanis – Executive Director
Ann Fields Monical – Development Director
Bob Easter – Stewardship Director
Sam Cody – Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator
Becki Reibman – Administrative Assistant
Justin Harmeson – Stewardship Manager
Zach Neff – Stewardship Manager
Lucas Wilson – Land Steward

NICHES Board Members

Trent Hanthorn – President
Vanessa Pacheco – Vice President
Rick Johnson-Sheehan - Secretary
Brent Talcott – Treasurer
Mike Bristol
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Join the NICHES Friend Drive!

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

Learn more at nicheslandtrust.org/friends



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