



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT





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## OUR MISSION

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.

Image: Oak slope at Gladys and Al Wright Rock Creek Nature Preserve  
Cover Image: Aerial photograph of the Farris Estate

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear NICHES Friends,

"A little niche here, little niche there" is adding up to nearly 5,000 acres!

In 2024, NICHES Land Trust continued to grow by adding nearly 200 acres to our protected lands through six acquisition projects.

Five of those acquisitions were made possible through the generosity of landowners who donated or bargain sold their land to NICHES. We are also extremely grateful to our members who have supported us as we grew to protect 4,836 acres of land this year.


The generosity of the partnerships in these projects speaks volumes about this community, as does the

12,000+ volunteer hours contributed in 2024, and major progress accomplished restoring habitat at the nature preserves.

NICHES continues to permanently protect the native habitats that provide and make up the beautiful landscape that is our portion of the Hoosier state.

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.

For Nature,



Shannon Stanis  
Executive Director

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Bob Easter

### STEWARDSHIP MANAGERS

Justin Harmeson

Zach Neff

### ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Becki Reibman



# 2024

## BY THE NUMBERS

Together, with our 1,421 supporters, NICHES was able to protect new lands and connect more people to nature in 2024.

# 4,836

Total Acres  
of Land  
Protected



**67**  
Properties  
Sustained

**51**  
Public  
Preserves

**18**  
Miles  
of Trails

**7**  
Water  
Access Points

**2,458**  
Program  
Participants

**356**  
Volunteers

**12,394**  
Volunteer  
Hours

*Equivalent  
to almost  
6 Extra  
Full Time  
Staff!*

**554**  
Acres  
Managed  
with Fire

NICHES conducted 9 controlled burns in the late winter and early spring of 2024, totaling 554 acres.

This was the second largest burn season for NICHES! Since 2014, NICHES has conducted 140 prescribed fires, covering a combined 4,935 acres.



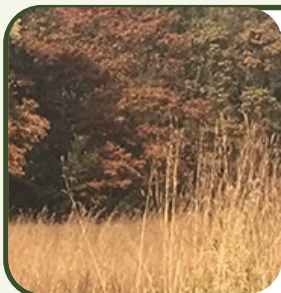
# LAND ACQUISITIONS

**188**  
new acres will  
be protected  
forever!



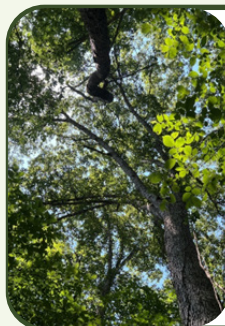
## 1. Goose & Gander Island

- 1.5 acres in Carroll County, near NICHES' Frog's Glory preserve
- 2 small islands in the Tippecanoe River that are open to the public as a resting point for paddlers



## 2. Warren Prairie Sanctuary CE

- 3.4 acre Conservation Easement donation in Warren County
- Restored tall grass prairie
- Part of a larger 535 acre matrix of protected habitat in the Big Pine Valley



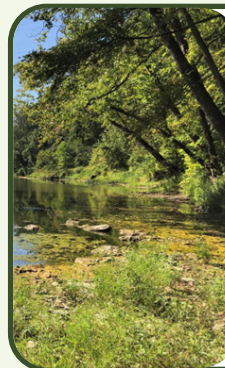
## 3. The Howell Woods

- 27 acres in Tippecanoe County, 0.14 miles away from NICHES' Mulvey Pond preserve
- Purchased with Support from the Laura Hare Charitable Trust, McAllister Foundation, and the Whistler Foundation
- Features high-quality mesic oak woodland, including old remnant bur and white oak dominating the canopy



## 4. Spring Creek Forest

- 13 acres in White County along Spring Creek a tributary to the Tippecanoe River, about one mile west of NICHES' Frog's Glory
- This wooded preserve is enrolled in the Classified Forest Program and has recently been cleared of invasive shrubs by the property donors



## 5. Cunila Cliffs

- 18 acres in Montgomery County, downstream Sugar Creek of NICHES' Backner Nature Reserve
- Bargain Purchased in September 2024 with support from the Laura Hare Charitable Trust, McAllister Foundation, and the Whistler Foundation
- The property includes an uneven-aged stand of glacial remnant eastern hemlock, an uncommon species in Indiana which is found locally in only 13 counties



## 6. Williams Woods Addition

- 126 acres in Warren County, which expands NICHES' Williams Woods preserve to 241 acres
- Purchased in a Bargain Sale from the Williams family with support from the Next Level Conservation Trust, Warren County Community Foundation, Roy A. Whistler Foundation, Central Indiana Land Trust, and the Josie and Geoff Fox Family Foundation
- Protects 35 acres remnant burr oak savanna, and it is an opportunity to restore 90 acres of agricultural land to silt loam savanna



# STEWARDSHIP ADVANCEMENTS

*NICHES' Stewardship Program focuses on a key set of practices that address challenges threatening the natural systems in our region. Invasive species management is a complex issue that utilizes a majority of our stewardship team's resources to move toward a stable ecological trajectory for our preserves.*

## NICHES' Largest Restoration Project Enters Next Phase

### The Lois L. Farris Estate

Over the last year, NICHES worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Eco Logic to restore the 400-acre Farris Estate to its native prairie – our largest project to date!

NICHES staff and partners worked to forestry mulch invasive shrubs across 175 acres, conduct prescribed fire, foliar spray invasive shrub resprouts, and remove non-native and overabundant native trees.

NICHES also contracted with Midwest Biological Survey to conduct a vascular plant inventory and baseline insect survey of the preserve.

Our stewardship team is thrilled to begin Phase 2 of the project which will involve restoration of hydrology, continued maintenance of remnant areas, and restoration of approximately 200-acres currently in row crops.

Image: Lead plant blooms at the Farris Estate

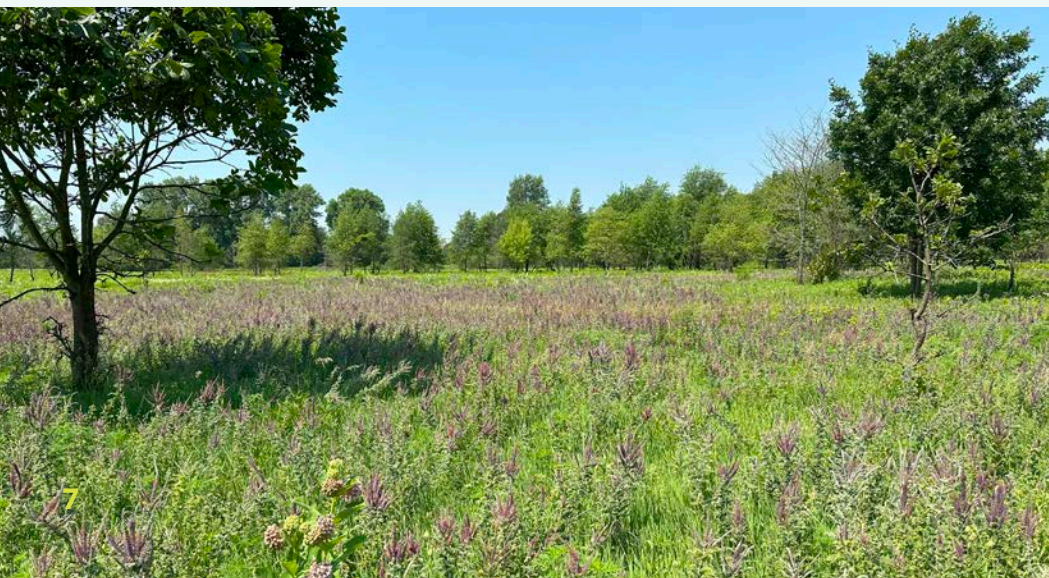


Image: NICHES staff and volunteers at Laura Hare Bend of the Wabash East

## Wea Plains Restoration Continues

### Laura Hare Bend of the Wabash East

NICHES worked with USDA biologists to plan out seed mixes for roughly 32 acres of sand prairie and 108 acres of tallgrass floodplain prairie in western Tippecanoe County at Laura Hare Bend of the Wabash East.

Throughout 2024, NICHES and Eco Logic staff worked extensively to remove invasive species and seed, mow, and plant native species to restore the native prairie.



## Opening Up the Canopy

### Shawnee Bottoms and Potawatomi Trail

At the end of 2024, NICHES implemented a management timber harvest at Shawnee Bottoms and Potawatomi Trail.

The goal with these timber harvests was to control canopy composition and cover for maximum ecological benefit.

The two preserves selected for a management timber harvest have a similar stewardship history of wide-spread invasive removal, including attention to seed sources outside of our boundaries, multiple prescribed fires, extensive understory thinning, and regular deer management.

We know the regeneration of young oaks and hickories is not possible with canopies nearing 100% closure – even in woodlands that have been stewarded carefully at the ground-level like these two preserves.

NICHES worked with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and a consultant forester to determine the goals of the harvest, desired final canopy cover, species of trees to target and to exclude from harvest. We carefully planned the timing of the harvest, cutting, staging, and removal of harvested trees.

#### The results of this stewardship will include:

- Revival of populations of many species in the herbaceous layer that are recovering with reduced leaf litter and shade, especially woodland grasses, sedges, and mid-late season forbs.
- An increase in soil tilth and subsequent increase in ant populations, which are responsible for dispersal of many of our spring ephemeral wildflowers.

*“I have watched as the work we have done has peeled back the layers of time and revealed the potential for recovery of quality open oak woodland. Now it is time to let the sun truly shine in these special places...”*

**- Bob Easter, NICHES Stewardship Director**

**An important part of NICHES’ mission is connecting people to nature. Educational outreach and volunteer opportunities are tantamount for inspiring and building our conservation community.**



The year started off well with NICHES’ 5th Annual **“War of the Weeds”** garlic mustard removal initiative. We held 32 volunteer shifts across NICHES’ service area and engaged over 350 dedicated volunteers.

NICHES hosted its annual **Summer Adventure Camp** in June for 33 local children aged 11-14 years old.



NICHES also partnered with organizations, such as **Wednesdays in the Wild** and **Wabash Riverfest** to offer hikes and other outreach programs throughout the year.

In our biggest **Creek Clean Up** event ever, NICHES partnered with Caterpillar to remove trash between NICHES’ Peter’s Mill Landing on Wildcat Creek and Davis Ferry on the Wabash River. They removed more than 1,000 pounds of trash from the waterways!



Between October 25-27, NICHES hosted the 5th Annual **Jack-O'-Lantern Hike** at Clegg Memorial Garden, with nearly 1,000 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.

# OPERATIONAL INSIGHTS

# CONSERVATION CHAMPIONS

NICHES Land Trust continues to be accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, meaning that our organization has demonstrated a commitment to upholding the highest standards of accountability and conservation excellence.

### 2024 Financial Summary (unaudited)

#### Operating Revenue & Support

Contributions	\$425,000
Government Grants	148,638
Other Grants	38,664
Endowment Disbursements	7,349
Earned Income	249,948
In-Kind Contributions	6,818

**Total Income \$921,417**

#### Operating Expenditures

Land Stewardship	\$517,940
Programs & Outreach	64,458
Administrative & General	302,774
Fundraising	89,353
In-Kind Expenses	6,818

**Total Expense \$981,343**

Note: NICHES’ multi-year stewardship efforts are supported by revenue that is not always received in the same year as the expenses for the work. Our annual operating budget may sometimes appear to be a net loss, because our work is supported by grants, endowment distributions, and other revenue do not appear on this year’s financial report.



- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
- Responsible Governance
- Lasting Stewardship

We recognize it is an honor to be entrusted with the generous support of our community, and we take pride in our strong financial management practices.

### 2024 Volunteer of the Year: Bill Arthur

During Bill Arthur’s tenure on the Board of Directors (2015-2024), NICHES made significant advancements in its operations and community outreach. Bill’s commitment to environmental conservation, practical leadership, and his seemingly limitless well of energy and enthusiasm has been instrumental in advancing NICHES’ mission over the past decade. As his term ends on the board, we are delighted he will continue his involvement NICHES.



### Thank You to Our 2024 Corporate Sponsors & Partners!

#### Foundation Partners

Community Foundation of Greater Lafayette  
Duke Energy Foundation  
Laura Hare Charitable Trust  
Josie & Geoff Fox Family Foundation  
McAllister Foundation  
Montgomery County Community Foundation  
NEXTEra Energy Foundation  
North Central Health Services  
NICHES Endowment Foundation  
NiSource Foundation  
Roy A. Whistler Foundation  
SIA Foundation  
Warren County Community Foundation  
Western Indiana Community Foundation

#### Conservation Champions

(\$10,000+)  
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#### Corporate Sponsors (\$5,000+)

Duke Energy  
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#### Corporate Partners (\$500+)

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Lafayette Urban Ministry  
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Phronesis, Inc.  
Purdue Federal Credit Union  
Old National Bank  
Zebra Landscape & Hardscape

#### Conservation Partners

Central Indiana Land Trust  
Indiana DNR  
Indiana Land Protection Alliance  
Indiana Soil & Water Conservation Districts  
Midwest Biological Survey  
Tippecanoe Invasive Cooperative Taskforce  
U.S. Dept. of Agriculture  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Wabash River Enhancement Corporation

#### Business Supporters

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