



**NICHES**  
Land Trust

**2025**  
**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.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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STEWARDSHIP MANAGERS: Justin Harmeson, Zach Neff
LAND STEWARD: Cassidy Steininger

Image: Moyer-Gould Woods (Carroll County)
Cover Image: Honey Branch Bluff Over Big Pine Creek (Warren County)

Dear NICHES Friends,

NICHES Land Trust has been Helping Ecosystems Survive for thirty years! Since 1995, we have protected the natural landscapes that define our region, restored habitats for wildlife, and connected people to the places they cherish.

In 2025, we celebrated this milestone anniversary while achieving some of the most significant accomplishments in our history.

It was an extraordinary year for NICHES. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteers, partners, members, and donors, we continued to expand our impact across the region.

Together, we acquired three new preserves – two of them fully donated – and made substantial progress toward additional land protection projects planned for 2026.

We also celebrated our 30th Anniversary with 39 public programs and events that welcomed more than 4,000 participants. Volunteers contributed over 15,000 hours of service, and more than 1,500 donors provided critical support for our mission.

The completion of our new Stewardship Facility headquarters marked another important milestone, strengthening our ability to care for the lands entrusted to us. Across our preserves, we restored natural hydrology on 200 acres and conducted prescribed fire on 365 acres, improving habitat health and ecological resilience.

While these accomplishments are worth celebrating, they represent only part of the story. Every year, thousands of people visit our preserves, enjoy our trails, and support conservation in ways that cannot always be measured. The trust and commitment of our community remain the foundation of everything we do.

As we reflect on 30 years of conservation success, we are deeply grateful for your support.

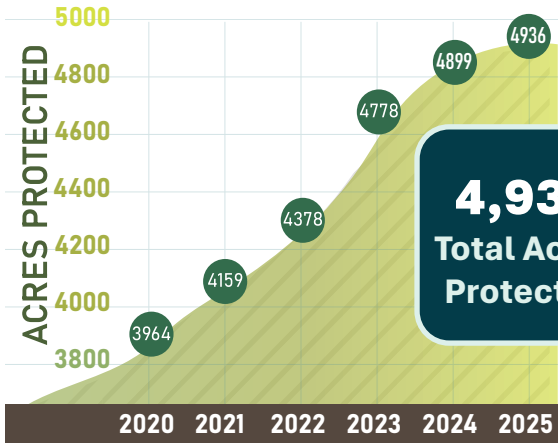
Thank you for helping protect the prairies, woodlands, wetlands, and waterways that make northern Indiana such a special place.

For Nature,
[Signature]
Shannon Stanis, Executive Director



# 2025 BY THE NUMBERS

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**4,936**  
Total Acres  
Protected

**77**  
Properties Sustained

**54**  
Public Preserves

**200**  
Acres Hydrologically Restored

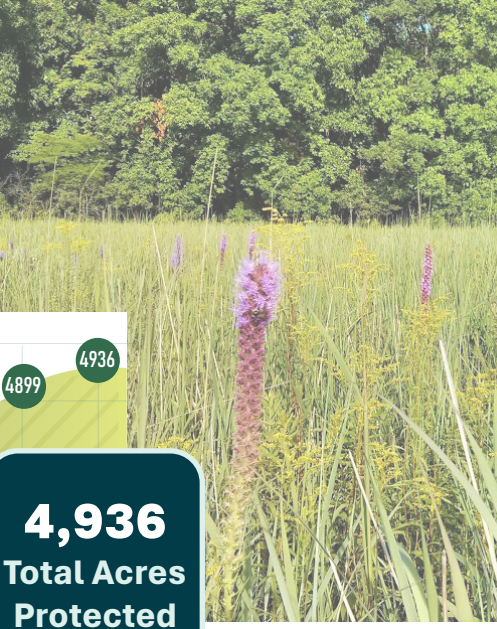
**53**  
Trees Planted

**18**  
Miles of Trails

**7**  
Water Access Points

**7**  
Prescribed Fires

**365**  
Acres Burned



**15,014** Volunteer Hours

**479** Individual Volunteers

**59** Volunteer Workdays

**39** Public Programs

**4,022** Event Participants

**1,536** NICHES Supporters



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# LAND ACQUISITIONS

**36.9**  
new acres will  
be protected  
forever!



## 1 Frank & Ada Beineke Memorial Forest Addition

- 14.4-acre land bequest in Tippecanoe County from Walt Beineke
- This addition brings the preserve's total acreage to 42 acres
- The property features oak woodland slopes and maturing Black Walnut stand planted by Walt
- Monitoring by the Bellisario Lab at Purdue has indicated it is "rich with wildlife including bobcats"

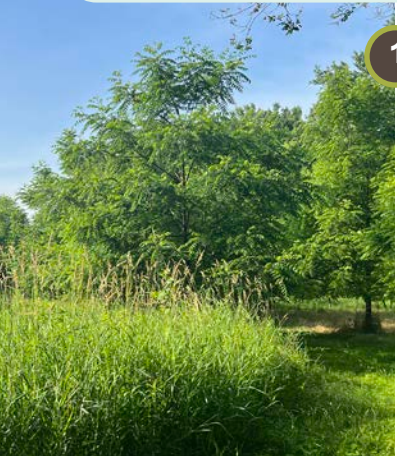
## 2 Sea Lily Seeps

- 12.9 acres in Montgomery County along Sugar Creek, near NICHES' Walnut Fork Preserve
- The property features floodplain habitat with walnut trees, seeps, and a healthy diversity of wetland plants
- This stretch of Sugar Creek is abundant with crinoid fossils
- Purchased with support from the City of Crawfordsville and Roy Whistler Foundation



## 3 Swanson's Bluff Expansion

- 9.6-acre land donation from Dr. Roy Coolman in Warren County along Big Pine Creek to expand existing preserve
- The now 36-acre preserve features examples of oak and pine woodlands, sandstone bluffs, and calcareous seeps
- The property contains a range of rare flora such as forbes saxifrage, new jersey tea, eastern white pine, purple milkweed, and walking fern



# STEWARDSHIP ADVANCEMENTS



## Stewardship Facility Construction Completed

### *A Next Step for Conservation*

In 2025, NICHES took a major step forward in strengthening our long-term stewardship capacity with the completion of a custom-designed stewardship headquarters facility in Warren County.

The new facility provides dedicated space for equipment storage, maintenance, native seed processing, and day-to-day stewardship operations. Following construction, staff spent the second half of the year transitioning from the former shop at Arbor America, organizing shelving and workbenches, and creating efficient systems for tool and equipment storage.

Additional support from the Community Foundation of Greater Lafayette and Warren County Community Foundation helped us purchase smaller equipment to improve field operations.

The facility is already serving as a hub for native seed collection and

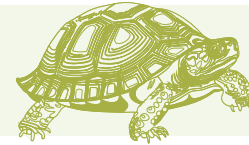
restoration work. In 2025, NICHES staff processed and mixed seed from our preserves for use in restoration projects.

***Looking ahead, we will establish seed production nursery beds at this facility to create a living extension of our conservation work across NICHES service area.***

The Stewardship Facility came from careful strategic planning and transformational gifts from dedicated members. Many years ago, the board recognized the need to invest in the equipment and infrastructure necessary to care for preserves efficiently and reduce reliance on outside contractors. Conversations about NICHES's operational needs led to a major gift for the facility from a devoted family. This "seed funding" provided the momentum for the capital fundraising campaign and inspired others to join the effort.

Image: A birds-eye view of NICHES Stewardship Headquarters Facility

Following the facility's grand opening in August, another generous private donor was inspired by our progress and decided to make a major gift for the purchase of a brand new tractor and 12-foot batwing mower (pictured right), significantly expanding our land management capacity.



***NICHES' Stewardship Program focuses on a key set of practices that address challenges threatening the natural systems in our region.***

## Restoring 400 Acres of Native Habitat

### The Lois Lynn Farris Estate

In 2022, Lois Lynn Farris bequeathed a vision for a thriving mosaic of wetlands, prairie, and savanna habitat and the resources to make it a reality on her farm in White County. The 400-acre Farris Estate is our largest and most significant stand-alone restoration project.

Roughly half of the property had been in row crop production, while the remaining acres included classified forest, remnant prairie, sedge meadows, shrub thickets, and young

woodland. Historically, much of this landscape would have been open prairie and savanna, with natural hydrology supporting diverse wetland systems. Restoring those ecological functions has been the central focus of stewardship efforts.

*(continued on page 9)*

Image: A view of the prairie in September at the Farris Estate





A series of drainage ditches like the one pictured left were closed to hydrologically restore the wetland at Farris.



Throughout 2025, staff treated invasive shrubs and trees, managing smooth brome through contracted drone spraying, and addressed aggressive species including poison hemlock, reed canary grass, Saponaria, and spotted knapweed. In collaboration with The Nature Conservancy and Spence Restoration Nursery, NICHES developed restoration seed mixes designed specifically for the former agricultural fields, to be sowed in winter 2026/27.

Another major milestone came with continued progress in the Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) enrollment process and permitting through the Indiana Department of Environmental Management. Final permits to fill artificial drainage ditches were secured, allowing hydrology restoration to begin in December.

Through a partnership with LR Excavating and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, nearly two miles of man-made drainage ditches were closed between December 2025 and January 2026 (pictured above, right) restoring the site's natural water movement and dramatically improving wetland function.

This work marks an important shift for the Farris Estate from a working agricultural landscape back toward the resilient natural systems that once defined it. As restoration continues, the property will become not only a cornerstone of NICHES' protected lands, but also a lasting example of how conservation can heal and sustain the land for generations to come.

## Returning the Prairie

### Laura Hare Bend of the Wabash East

Since acquiring Laura Hare Bend of the Wabash East in late 2022, NICHES has been steadily transforming this 200-acre property from former agricultural ground into a resilient native landscape along the Wabash River floodplain. Protected with support from the Laura Hare Charitable Trust, Roy Whistler Foundation, McAllister Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Greater Lafayette, the preserve connects Granville Sand Barrens and Roy Whistler Wildlife Area to the Wabash River and helps protect nearly 30 acres of rare sand barrens habitat while restoring vital riparian ecosystems.

This property lies within the historic Wea Plains, where more than 8,000 acres of prairie once stretched across western Tippecanoe County. Original federal land survey records show that nearly all of Laura Hare Bend of the Wabash East (except for a narrow strip of riparian woodland) was prairie in the early 1820s.

Because of this history, NICHES worked with USDA biologists through the Natural Resources Conservation Service Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) program to permanently retire 140 acres of former row crop floodplain and restore it to native habitat. Restoration plans were developed for approximately 32 acres of sand prairie and 108 acres of tallgrass floodplain prairie, creating the foundation for a large-scale return of native grassland.

Initial seeding was completed in early 2024, and throughout 2025 stewardship efforts focused on helping that restoration establish and thrive. Staff completed multiple rounds of follow-up treatment targeting aggressive species such as reed canary grass, curly dock, poison hemlock, bush honeysuckle, and thistle species that can quickly outcompete young native plantings.

*(continued on page 11)*



Image: A view of the prairie restoration at Laura Hare Bend of the Wabash East in July 2025

NICHES also partnered with Arbor America for both an in-kind and contracted round of mowing across the restoration area, helping suppress invasive growth and strengthen native seed establishment. These mowing efforts were followed by targeted herbicide applications by NICHES staff to further manage problem species and support long-term prairie health.

The preserve has now transitioned from establishment to the maintenance phase under the NRCS WRE program – an important milestone that reflects years of planning, partnership, and active stewardship.

As prairie species continue to mature and the floodplain regains its natural function, Laura Hare Bend of the Wabash East is becoming a sustainable native habitat that supports pollinators, birds, amphibians like the rare Plains Leopard Frog, and cleaner water along the Wabash River corridor.

**This work represents more than restoration – it is the return of a landscape to its natural identity.**

By replacing former row crop fields with functioning prairie, wetland, and riparian habitat, NICHES is ensuring that Laura Hare Bend of the Wabash East will remain a place of ecological resilience, biodiversity, and quiet connection to nature for generations to come.

Images:  
Native prairie species thriving in September 2025 (top)  
The restored prairie in August 2025 (bottom)



## NATURE CONNECTIONS

**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.**

In 2025, NICHES drew on the passion, knowledge, and expertise of its staff and numerous volunteers to deliver a full and engaging outreach calendar. NICHES hosted over 30 different programs and events to celebrate 30 years of conservation.

Highlights included a new series of mindfulness hikes, woodcock walks, and creek stomps, as well as hands-on experiences like electrofishing, moth collection, and macroinvertebrate sampling.

**NICHES also hosted its biggest-ever workday when over 170 students from Klondike Middle School helped pull garlic mustard at Granville Sand Barrens.** (pictured top right)

Summer Adventure Camp once again offered three weeks of immersive exploration for young naturalists. Other seasonal events showcased wildflowers, amphibians, and even allowed participants to smell and taste their local natural heritage through a spring maple sugaring festival and fall harvest presentation.

In addition to public events, NICHES staff and volunteers connected people to nature by giving presentations to local organizations, clubs, and businesses, as well as by tabling at community events such as GreenFest and Riverfest.



# OPERATIONAL INSIGHTS

*NICHES Land Trust is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, meaning that our organization demonstrates a commitment to upholding the highest standards of accountability and conservation excellence.*



## 2025 Financial Summary *(unaudited)*

### Operating Revenue & Support

Contributions	\$554,975
Government Grants	28,663
Other Grants	7,151
Endowment Disbursements	36,175
Endowment Net Assets Increase	68,105
Earned Income	62,512
In-Kind Contributions	4,910

**Total Income** **\$762,492**

### Operating Expenditures

Land Stewardship	\$404,857
Programs & Outreach	78,307
Administrative & General	262,301
Fundraising	103,702
In-Kind Expenses	4,910

**Total Expense** **\$854,077**

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 that 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.*

# CONSERVATION CHAMPIONS

## 2025 Volunteer of the Year: Cora Atkinson



Cora's connection with NICHES began early through our Summer Adventure Camp Program. From the beginning, her excitement and love for being outdoors were clear.

When Cora turned 14 and aged out of camp, she chose to stay involved and took the initiative to reach out about returning as a Junior Camp Counselor. Since then, she has contributed more than 250 volunteer hours across six full weeks of camp programming.

## Thank You to Our 2025 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  
North Central Health Services  
NICHES Endowment Foundation  
Roy A. Whistler Foundation  
SIA Foundation  
Warren County Community Foundation  
Western Indiana Community Foundation

### Conservation Champions

*(\$10,000+)*  
CenterPoint Energy Foundation  
NIPSCO / NiSource Foundation  
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Subaru of America  
Zeigler Subaru of Lafayette

### Corporate Sponsors

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Rainbow Trout Solar  
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Tri-Tech Construction

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*(\$500+)*  
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Isch Insurance Services Inc.  
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Phronesis, Inc.  
Purdue Federal Credit Union  
Wintek  
Zebra Landscape & Hardscape

### Conservation Partners

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

### Business Supporters

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