

# THE SPROUT



NICHES LAND TRUST | SUMMER 2023 | VOLUME 27 ISSUE 2

Celebrating Earth Day | Shared Love for Nature | Thank You Aspen 1

*"Lady's Slipper Orchid" Cover art by NICHES Volunteer: Gabriela Sincich*

*"Where flowers bloom so does hope" - Lady Bird Johnson*

# *Executive Director Update*

In this edition of The Sprout, we celebrate a robust community of supporters. The active spring season is highlighted by AmeriCorps members planting trees, volunteers pulling garlic mustard, and local businesses sharing generous gifts for nature's benefit. NICHES has immense gratitude for all these partnerships that culminate in a sustained positive impact on the health of local ecosystems.

I am continuously reminded that our presence has impact at the individual and community level, for human and non-humans alike. This April, I had the pleasure of leading garlic mustard pulls at Berkshire Tarnowski Forest Preserve alongside the property donor, Judy Berkshire. Judy shared with the group that beavers had been hard at work in the forest. We chatted about the importance of beavers: how they are a keystone species that greatly shape habitats. Beavers were nearly driven extinct in the 1800s and many conservation groups have begun reintroduction projects to improve biodiversity, restore wetlands, and even help prevent wildfires. Judy was very happy to see the beaver activity on the property and to know they have a forever protected home.

While pulling garlic mustard along the serene Deer Creek, I found myself following a beaver path through rue anemone, trillium, may apples, and wild ginger. The trees along the trail were marked by wounds from beaver teeth. I was excited to find their work and reflect on my surroundings, knowing the individual beavers will have positive impacts on the community over time. The water rushed over the creek bed rocks and birds were singing, many returning from their winter migration. The wind moved the tops of the trees not yet leafed out. There was a marked absence of vehicular traffic and other noise pollution. Feelings of calm, safety, and security washed over. It's understandable the beavers found this spot to call home.



Beaver browse on Deer Creek

The humans at NICHES keep as busy as the beavers, ensuring high quality stewardship for special natural areas, public access for recreation on the trails and waterways, and habitat for native species. We are optimistic for a fruitful and engaged summer of stewardship and outreach programming, all made possible by your support.

*-NICHES Executive Director, Shannon Stanis*  
[shannon@nicheslandtrust.org](mailto:shannon@nicheslandtrust.org)

# *Shared Love for Nature*

Stewarding our local ecosystems at the highest level possible is a massive undertaking that truly wouldn't be possible without a tapestry of local volunteers and funding partners. One of our most active local community organizations in this effort is Bob Rohrman Subaru. From removing invasive species to creating new trails for the public to enjoy, Bob Rohrman Subaru volunteers collectively provide our organization with hundreds of volunteer hours annually. Beyond helping to fulfill the stewardship mission of our organization with volunteer assistance, Bob Rohrman Subaru helps sustain that effort by contributing directly as a financial sponsor.

NICHES would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to Bob Rohrman Subaru for recently sharing the love with a nearly \$27,000 contribution from their 2022-2023 fundraising event! The "Share the Love" Event is entering its 16th year for Subaru of America, Inc. During the Share the Love event (mid-November – early January), for every new vehicle purchased or leased, Subaru donates \$250 to the purchaser's choice of participating charities. For the last ten years Subaru retailers have been able to select a hometown charity to receive additional donations. NICHES is honored to be Bob Rohrman Subaru's hometown charity! This financial support helps NICHES stay focused on our mission, giving us vital support for protection, restoration, and stewardship of natural areas, and keeps NICHES preserves open for public recreation. From all of us at NICHES Land Trust, thank you Bob Rohrman Subaru for providing volunteer effort, essential funding, and community support for our local nature preserves!





# *Celebrating Earth Day*

On April 22 and 23 NICHES members, volunteers, and supporters gathered in Carroll County to celebrate Earth Day with our Annual Meeting and a series of nature themed activities. The weekend began with a volunteer effort to combat invasive species at our Moyer Gould Preserve. In between garlic mustard pulls, volunteers were treated to an outdoor performance by the Greater Lafayette Dance Collective.



Greater Lafayette Dance Collective Members perform under Moyer Gould's iconic 'Great Oak'

At our Berkshire-Tarnowski Forest Preserve, supporters gathered for a poetry hike led by retired Purdue Associate Professor of English, Christian Knoeller. This beautiful preserve along Deer Creek was donated to NICHES in 2013 by Judy Berkshire and Jim Tarnowski. Judy joined the hike and shared stories of many decades of stewardship and nature appreciation at the preserve. Garlic mustard pulls continued there on Sunday. A few miles away at our Frogs' Glory preserve NICHES board member Vanessa Pacheco led a guided meditation for attendees looking to immerse themselves and reflect in Nature. Friends also gathered at the Opera House Gallery in Delphi for an artist reception to celebrate the exhibit "Invest in Our Planet" featuring nature themed art from 11 artists.

Later Saturday evening these satellite events culminated in our Annual Meeting at the Wabash and Erie Canal Interpretive Center in Delphi. Staff and friends gathered to share conversations, reflect on the past year of stewardship success, and thank retiring board members Amanda Ingram, Denise Laussade, and Jason Rakoczy for their many years of dedicated service. Thank you to everyone who makes up our amazing organization; we are so excited to continue growing together for a greener future in 2023!



NICHES Executive Director Shannon Stanis shares organizational updates with membership.

# Meet our 2023 Summer Stewards!



My love for nature and the outdoors started with exploring my backyard and anyplace I could find trees. I spent most of my childhood flipping over rocks to ID insects and climbing trees to watch birds. I grew up in Indianapolis and found myself more attached to parks and to the small creek in my yard than to the city life. I'm now a junior majoring in Wildlife Biology with a minor in Entomology at Purdue University. The topic I love the most about nature is how intricate each ecosystem is, so it is a dream come true to learn more about the ecosystem while protecting it. I can't wait to apply the knowledge I've learned the past two years and gain more from working with NICHES this summer!

*- Chrisite-Anna Hicks*

Growing up in West Lafayette, I have had a longstanding connection to the natural spaces around Tippecanoe, which strengthens whenever I am hiking, running or removing invasive species. I graduated from George Washington University in May, 2022, with a bachelor's degree in International Affairs, concentrating in Environmental Science. During my studies I took up a great interest in environmental management and sustainability. Since graduation, I have been volunteering locally, and preparing to join the Peace Corps in Senegal, where I will be working in environmental education and restoration. As I work with NICHES this summer, I look forward to learning about restoration techniques and community outreach. I am particularly excited to work at the Summer Camp, helping to engage a new generation with the outdoors.

*- Isaiah Robyne*



# *Sustaining an Important Effort*

The removal of garlic mustard from our preserves is an extremely important and time-dependent stewardship task. Even though this invasive weed is only functionally present in the ecosystem for 2-3 months out of the year, it directly competes with the bloom of native spring ephemeral wildflowers that our region is known for. Garlic mustard emerges earlier in the spring than most plants which helps it establish a foothold and monopolize light and nutrient resources. Its roots release allelochemicals that disrupts the underground network of mycorrhizal fungi that native plants rely on for nutrient transfer. To further cement its suppressive position in the forest, each plant can produce >1,000 seeds that remain viable in the soil for up to a decade.

In order to effectively manage this noxious weed, it's important to sustain removal efforts over a period of years. Vigilance is key, and skipping even a single season can erase years of hard fought progress. In early 2020, NICHES was faced with this exact scenario as the COVID-19 pandemic limited our ability to organize volunteers around this task. As restrictions were eventually lifted, we launched our first ever "War of the Weeds" program with the intention of quickly making up for lost time before the garlic mustard pulling window closed. Volunteers across our service area answered the call and over the course of two weeks over 100 volunteer shifts were filled allowing us to maintain the progress of years past.

Now 4 years later, NICHES is excited to announce that this year's annual volunteer effort to pull garlic mustard was the largest in our organization's history! Between April 14th and May 21st, volunteers came out to fill 383 individual pulling shifts. This is the 4th consecutive year of growth for the program and the 2nd year in a row that has brought in over 1,000 volunteer hours. This incredible level of sustained volunteer support is becoming increasingly visible on the preserves. What used to be truckloads of garlic mustard pulled is now bagfuls; properties that used to require multiple days of pulling now can be covered in a single day! On behalf of our native spring ephemeral wildflowers, thank you to everyone who came out to lend a hand this year. We can't wait to continue this important effort with you next year!

***-NICHES Volunteer Coordinator, Sam Cody***  
**sam@nicheslandtrust.org**





NICHE'S LAND TRUST



**WAR OF THE  
WEEDS**  
2023





Barred Owl. *Photograph by NICHES friend and volunteer: Chad Phelps*





Nature Fact: If a Barred Owl eats enough crayfish, the feathers under its wings can turn pink - just like a flamingo, which gets its distinctive hue from the high volume of shrimp in its diet!

# *NIPSCO Supports NICHES*

Stewarding natural areas well is a labor of love. It takes all kinds of resources to keep up with the demands of restoring and revitalizing our native ecosystems. NICHES has many wonderful partners that we work with to secure funds for acquisitions projects and for the heavy lifting portion of restoration, including converting agricultural land back to open prairie restoration.

This year, NIPSCO and the NiSource Charitable Foundation awarded NICHES \$25,000 to support the ongoing stewardship needs to protect and restore our biodiverse habitats within our overlapping service areas. NIPSCO serves the gas and electric energy needs of 32 counties in northern Indiana. NIPSCO and their parent company NiSource share values of environmental stewardship and community access to natural areas for recreation and enjoyment. This generous grant allows us to pay for staff time, supplies and travel to NICHES preserves in the NIPSCO service area for stewardship work of all kinds on 1,406 acres. While these projects are time consuming to plan and implement on the front end, the bulk of the protection and restoration work is in maintaining these projects in perpetuity. Foundation partners and government grants cover the lion's share of the front end but securing funding for continued stewardship, which is more abstract in nature, is more difficult. Maintaining fire breaks, implementing prescribed fire, keeping up on invasive species of all sorts, ensuring access for stewardship and the public are all essential aspects of our stewardship program. As our protected acres grow, so too does the list of maintenance duties for continued protection and restoration. NICHES relies on the gifts of our supporters (individuals, foundations, businesses) that understand the necessity of ongoing stewardship for lasting protection of ecologically healthy natural areas to fund these activities.

The grant from NIPSCO and the NiSource Charitable Foundation will help NICHES staff complete stewardship projects on the most diverse prairie restoration in the state at Fisher Oak Savanna, including spot treatment of woody invasive species that are scattered across the restoration. Some of these were top-killed by a fall prescribed fire in 2022 and will need sprayed, others in units not burned in 2022 will need cut and the stumps treated. The grant will also cover installation of fire breaks for the next unit up for prescribed fire and maintenance of invasive species across the preserve. Similar work will be completed across 19 other

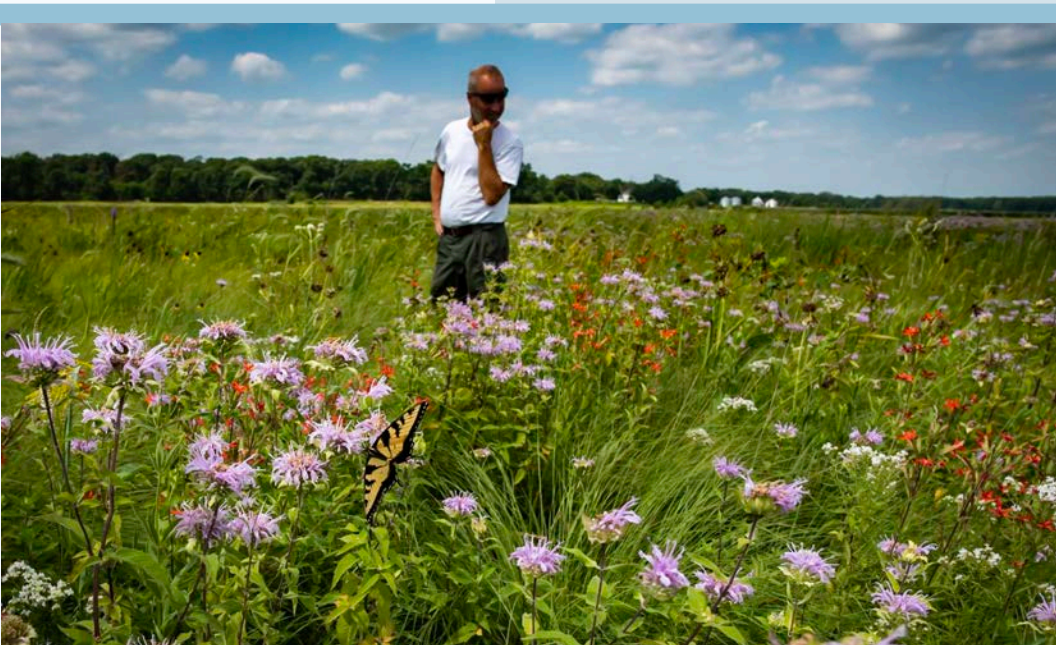


A population of butterfly weed blooming at our Holley Savanna Preserve. *Photo by: Chad Phelps*

preserves in the NIPSCO service area including Holley Savanna and Vacendak (Newton County), Sixbey and McAllister Woods along Wildcat Creek, Berkshire-Tarnowski along Deer Creek, Moyer-Gould Woods, and Frog's Glory (Carroll County), and elsewhere in Jasper, White and Howard counties. These 20 preserves represent a third of the total acreage that NICHES protects!

NICHES is committed to quality stewardship of all our preserves in perpetuity and it takes great staff, volunteers, supporters and partners to bring this important work forward. NICHES would like to thank NIPSCO and the NiSource Charitable Foundation for their support through this grant, which will help us move our remnant natural areas and restorations toward stable ecological trajectories and maintain as well as improve current biological diversity well into the future.

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



Tom Borgman, Natural Resource Manager for the Great Parks of Hamilton County, touring the most diverse prairie restoration in the State at our Fisher Oak Savanna Preserve.



# *Thank You Aspen 1!*

In April, NICHES and Camp Tecumseh celebrated the successful completion of a 2-month volunteer service project with our Aspen 1 AmeriCorps NCCC team! Over the course of their 4-week project period with NICHES, this dynamic 8-person team assisted with a wide variety of stewardship tasks, collectively contributed over 1,200+ volunteer hours, and made an incredible effort towards improving the health of our local ecosystems.

During the first half of the project, the team focused on installing a new fire break at Kohnke's Little Pine Valley Preserve, conducted 2 prescribed burns in the Black Rock Complex, made trail and property improvements at Clegg Memorial Garden, cleaned seeds for restoration projects, and treated invasive species at Adam's Mill. To fill the team's work schedule during rainy days, NICHES worked with our regional conservation partners at Kankakee Sands and Martell Forest to re-pot over 600 state-endangered Hills thistles and 400 American chestnut trees.

On April 17th, Purdue's Forestry and Natural Resources Farm Manager, Brian Beheler, provided his time and expertise with a furrow tree planter to help us plant 6,000+ shrubs at our Williams Woods Preserve in a single day! In order to protect a portion of these shrubs from white-tail deer herbivory, Aspen 1 team members worked for 3 days to tube and stake over 50% of the planted shrubs. In time, this thicket will become an important component of a recovering diverse native ecosystem that will provide mast and shelter for wildlife to utilize. Other AmeriCorps tasks in the final project period include planting 400+ trees at Kickapoo Cliffs, co-leading a public garlic mustard removal volunteer day at Frogs' Glory, cutting in over  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles of hiking trails at Fall Creek Gorge, and pulling garlic mustard at Honey Branch Bluff. Thank you, Aspen 1, for all the incredible time and effort spent on behalf of our local ecosystems. All of us at NICHES wish you the best in the next part of your journey in Iowa!



All the following haiku's were written by Aspen 1 Team Members and reflect their experience conducting controlled burns and volunteering with NICHES.

Our old ways still live,  
and from the roar of creeping  
fire, new life can spring.



Waterfall cascades  
and tendrils of rooted things,  
giving and giving.



Grass hiding insects,  
eager birds waiting for lunch,  
the fire creeps controlled.



Glory of grasslands,  
its silent whispers of wind  
will return with fire.



Busy bees flying,  
prodding fiery edges well,  
radio squawks orders.



Indiana sky,  
indigenous land breathing,  
old ways still living.



Heart-shaped leaves must go.  
Fire burns, earth glows in smoke  
and we start anew.



# Join a Committee!

The NICHES staff and board of directors invite you to get more involved by joining a committee! NICHES has 4 committees open to members and is seeking new participants. Joining a committee is a fun and rewarding way to get to know the inner workings of our community organization while helping NICHES remain well organized, both fiscally and operationally, so we succeed in our mission to protect, restore, and sustain natural areas. Please contact [niches@nicheslandtrust.org](mailto:niches@nicheslandtrust.org) if you are interested in joining any of the following committees. Zoom options are available for all meetings.

**Finance Committee:** *Meets the 3rd Friday of each month @ 9am*

Reviews the preliminary monthly financial reports and annual proposed budget; administers the annual distribution from endowments; recommends contributions to reserves and funds in the endowments; provides guidance for separation of duties and application of controls; and receives and reviews annual audit of the corporation.

**Properties Committee:** *Meetings are ad hoc*

Supports indoor and outdoor needs at our two properties with structures: Clegg Memorial Gardens and Parker's Hickory Grove Farm. Projects are completed regularly throughout the year through individual effort and group work. Members of this group make up the Trail Crew that meet Saturday mornings during the spring, summer, and fall at Clegg Memorial Gardens to work on trail projects.

**Development Committee:** *Meets the 1st Monday of each month @ 4pm over Zoom*

Coordinates our fundraising efforts so that we have the fiscal support necessary to help nature thrive. Members give input and monitor progress on the annual development plan, help organize fundraising events and campaigns, write and review fundraising materials, propose policies and develop plans, procedures, and schedules for board involvement in fund raising, help educate board members about the resources needed to realize the organization's plans and fulfill its mission, and play a strong role in identifying, cultivating, and approaching major donors.

**Acquisitions Committee:** *Meets the 1st Thursday of even months @ 4pm at Clegg*

Reviews potential land acquisitions to ensure they meet our Land and Water protection goals within our strategic plan. Members give input on the conservation value of potential opportunities, vote to approve or deny acquisitions, contact and work with landowners, present new opportunities to the committee, develop appropriate language and terms for conservation easements and land gift agreements, and provide policy oversight for the land protection program.



# NICHES is Turning 28!

## NICHES Birthday Campaign

This summer NICHES is celebrating 28 years of conservation success! We have set a birthday goal of raising \$10,000 during the month of July to support NICHES' future. Centier Bank has committed \$1,500 to the campaign already AND a generous, anonymous donor has pledged to match each donation to our goal, so your gift is doubled! Please donate online or by mail in support of our Birthday Campaign this July and join the party!

**Sunday July 16, 2023**  
**Clegg Memorial Garden**

**12 to 3pm**

Guided hikes, sweet treats, games, and comradery in nature!

RSVP to [niches@nicheslandtrust.org](mailto:niches@nicheslandtrust.org)



## Thank You to our Additional Sponsors!



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FOUNDATION**

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For more information on sponsorships, contact our Executive Director, Shannon Stanis at [shannon@nicheslandtrust.org](mailto:shannon@nicheslandtrust.org) or call 765-423-1605.

Did you know that in addition to providing direct support to local conservation, being a NICHES member also gives you access to members-only events? Join us on Saturday, August 12th at the Purdue Aquaculture Research Lab (5675 W 600 N, West Lafayette, IN) at 1pm for a screening of Katelyn Calhoun's "Hellbender in the Blue" documentary featuring Indiana's state-endangered hellbender salamander, as well as the conservation efforts underway to protect and restore their populations. Afterwards participants will get a behind-the-scenes tour of Indiana's largest hellbender captive rearing facility by Purdue Professor and NICHES Volunteer Dr. Rod Williams. Space is limited to 15 individuals; please contact [sam@nicheslandtrust.org](mailto:sam@nicheslandtrust.org) to register for this event.



Dr. Rod Williams beside a tank of young hellbenders