

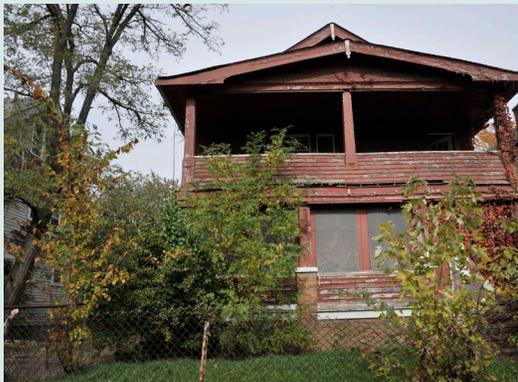


## Ohio land bank movement reaches milestone

Western Reserve Land Conservancy recently celebrated the establishment of Ohio's 46<sup>th</sup> county land bank.

"This means that more than half of Ohio counties now have a land bank," emphasized Jim Rokakis, vice president of the Land Conservancy and director of its Thriving Communities program. "County land banks are powerful tools for taking abandoned, tax delinquent properties and repurposing them for the benefit of local communities. The positive impact on communities across the state is truly transformational."

Land banks give counties the ability to take tax delinquent properties that have been neglected and repurpose them. The title to these properties is "cleansed" as a result of the foreclosure, and that clean title allows the property to be transferred easily to either an adjoining owner or another entity that will make the land productive again. This tool has been used thousands of times throughout Ohio since the land bank law was first passed.



see Land Banks on page 3...



## 600+ acres preserved in Ashtabula County enhances regional conservation efforts

Ashtabula County Metroparks recently partnered with Western Reserve Land Conservancy to purchase and permanently conserve 602 acres in the City of Conneaut. The impressive property boasts nearly one mile of undeveloped Lake Erie shoreline, a natural estuary, and more than 230 acres of high-quality wetlands. Moreover, the acquisition, adjacent to the 3,400-acre Roderick Wildlife Preserve (in Pennsylvania) and the 85-acre Ohio State Conneaut Wildlife Area to the south, creates a regionally-significant wildlife, outdoor, and recreation area.

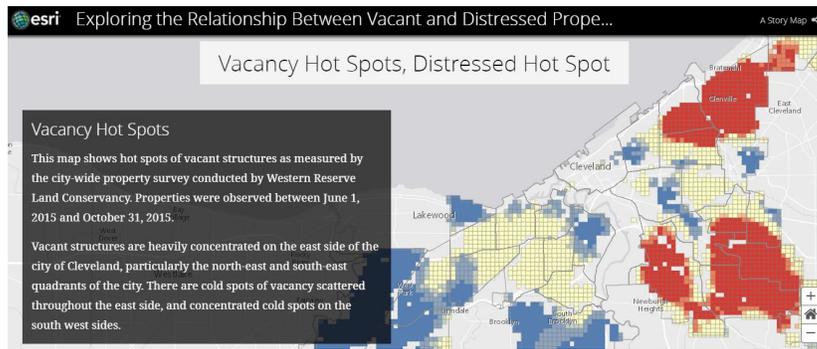
Turkey Creek Metropark, the new park owned and managed by the Ashtabula County Metroparks, will eventually offer outdoor recreational and educational opportunities including hiking, birding, angling, and wildlife observation.

"The Turkey Creek Estuary property is remarkable in many ways," noted Brett Rodstrom, vice president of eastern field operations for the Land Conservancy. In addition to the 3,050 linear feet of streams that fill and flow through 236 acres of wetlands, nearly one mile of Turkey Creek can be found on the property. The creek flows directly into a naturally-occurring, cold-water estuary, not often seen along the shores of Lake Erie. The wetland and estuary areas provide critical habitat to a number of species.

As a result of a two-day survey conducted by naturalists from the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, nearly 400 native plant and animal species were observed on the property, including three moth species

see Turkey Creek Estuary Project on page 4...

# Finding “hot spots” of vacancy, violent crime, and lead exposure



Be sure to check out the Poverty Center interactive story map for this project.

“While it’s well-known that vacant and abandoned properties decrease the value of surrounding properties, this study illuminates the phenomenon’s harmful effects on people, public health, safety and the future of our city.”

- Jim Rokakis

Vice President of the Land Conservancy and director of its Thriving Communities program

Seeking to better understand the spillover effects of vacant properties on the health and safety of Cleveland residents, as well as to strategize potential solutions, Western Reserve Land Conservancy commissioned a report from Case Western Reserve’s Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development (Poverty Center). The study found significant pockets of concentrated vacancy in Cleveland co-occur with hot spots of lead exposure and violent criminal activity.

The study is the first in Cleveland to combine a comprehensive survey of all properties with health and crime data. Researchers analyzed information on more than 158,000 city parcels — including vacancy status, the condition of any structures on the property, and photos collected by the Land Conservancy during the 2015 Cleveland Property Survey.

“Our findings are surprising—especially the concentration of violent crime in areas of vacant properties, since one might assume fewer people would be in these areas,” said April Hirsh Urban, a research assistant at the Poverty Center and the report’s co-author. “But where vacancy and lead exposure are at elevated levels and overlap, there is more likely to be violent crime, especially homicide, rape, robbery, weapons violations, and aggravated assault.”

The study was funded by and will be used by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency. It provides useful insight to policymakers considering ways to remediate vacant and blighted properties. For more information about the study, please visit the Land Conservancy’s website. 🌻

## Dynamic intern cohort energizes Land Conservancy

As summer wraps up and students head back to school, Western Reserve Land Conservancy recognizes our 2017 Summer Intern Cohort for their hard work and dedication to advancing our mission.

“This is one of the most outstanding cohorts we’ve worked with,” shared Rich Cochran, president and CEO of the Land Conservancy. “From managing citywide property inventories and conducting landowner interviews, to writing grants and analyzing complex geographic data, our diverse group of interns thoughtfully and enthusiastically tackled complex land conservation and restoration projects.”

The Land Conservancy offers a variety of internships throughout the organization with the aim of providing valuable, hands-on work experience. Our internship program has inspired many to pursue full-time study and work in the conservation field. In fact, internships at the Land Conservancy have brought us many talented employees.

The Land Conservancy sincerely thanks those donors that have generously supported our internship program, enabling us to provide stipends to our talented interns. If you’re interested in supporting the Land Conservancy’s internship program, please call 440-528-4150 for more information. 🌻



**Katherine Brown**

Outreach & Research Intern pursuing her bachelor’s degree at Middlebury College

Katherine shared, “My summer at the Land Conservancy allowed me to meet many different landowners across Northeast Ohio while working on a conservation video project. I was able to talk with them about their interest in conservation, tour their properties, and learn about how the Land Conservancy helped them meet their goals. The experience really gave me a new appreciation for the landscape of Ohio and how special it is to so many people!”

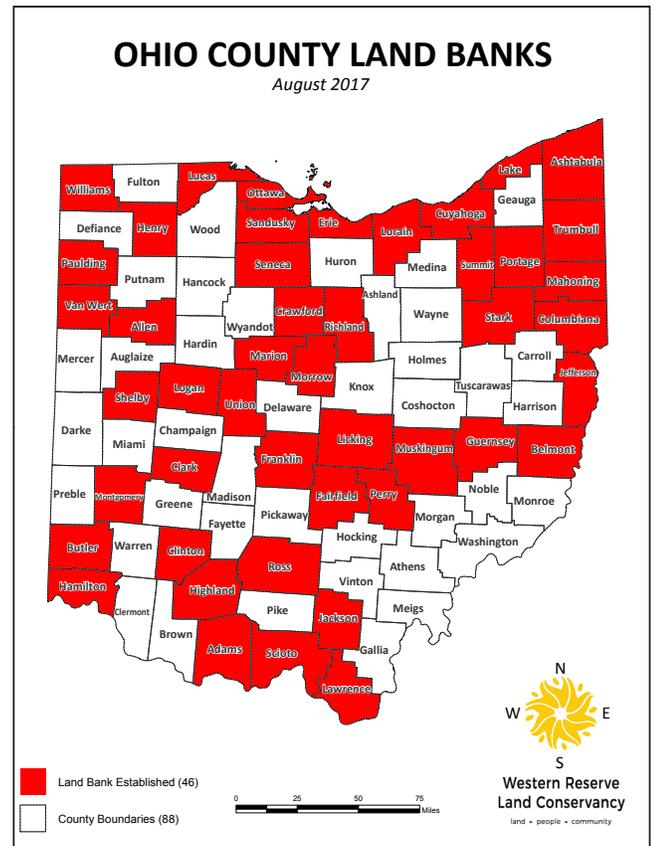
**Land Banks** continued ...

Rokakis, then the Cuyahoga County treasurer, was the driving force behind the 2008 state legislation that allowed Cuyahoga County to create Ohio's first county land bank. The following year, those counties with populations over 60,000 received authority to create land banks. In 2015, the population threshold was eliminated, thereby extending land-banking authority to every county in Ohio. Since that law took effect in September 2015, more than 20 additional land banks have been established across the state.

"Smaller counties have experienced many of the same issues as larger ones," explained Robin Thomas, land bank program director for the Land Conservancy. "They saw the success of larger county land banks in removing blighted properties and revitalizing communities, and they wanted to replicate those efforts in their own communities. These newer land banks are now seeing similar success."

Land bank officials will have the opportunity to share examples, lessons learned, and best practices at the seventh annual Ohio Land Bank Conference taking place in Cleveland from September 11 through 13. The conference has become a must-attend event for those in the public and private sectors who are interested in addressing the issue of blight in their communities.

The conference will feature more than 20 sessions covering issues such as repurposing of vacant and abandoned properties and building community support. Richard Cordray, director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, will give the keynote address on Tuesday, September 12. Mr. Cordray formerly served as Ohio Attorney General. Prior to that, he served as Ohio Treasurer and Franklin County Treasurer, two elected positions in which he led state and county banking, investment, debt, and financing activities.



More information about county land banks and the upcoming Ohio Land Bank Conference can be found on the Land Conservancy's website or call our Thriving Communities office at 216-515-8300. 🌻



**Dan Kloos**  
Conservation Intern pursuing his master's degree in environmental studies at Cleveland State University



**Imani Jasper**  
Keithley Professional Bridging Intern pursuing her master's degree in regional planning at Cornell University



**Brian Koehler**  
Development Intern pursuing his bachelor's degree at the University of Notre Dame



**Hannah Winger**  
Legal Intern pursuing her law degree at Case Western Reserve University School of Law



**Peter Dolan**  
Reforest Our City Intern pursuing his bachelor's degree at the University of Michigan



**Haley Marble**  
GIS Intern who recently graduated with her master's degree in landscape ecology from the University of Greenwich

Haley shared, "It has been a pleasure and an honor working for Western Reserve Land Conservancy. It is so inspiring to be working alongside like-minded individuals, with great spirit, in the name of conservation. This is exactly what I've wanted to do with my education and experience: apply it to something meaningful for the environment and the betterment of my beloved city. I will be forever grateful for this experience!"

In addition to those interns pictured on these pages, Jesse Krislov, Lena Richardson, and Jake Schoeppler spent part of their summer work on Land Conservancy projects. We thank them for their contributions!



Beautiful scenes from the 600-acre Turkey Creek Estuary project (clockwise from top left): estuary habitat, tadpole metamorphosis, undeveloped Lake Erie coastline, and swamp forest habitat.

identified for the first time in Ashtabula County; 60 bird species, including nesting migratory birds; and numerous other rare, potentially-threatened, and state-threatened species.

Larry Frimerman, executive director of Ashtabula County Metroparks, shared, “This wild and relatively inaccessible property is large enough to support rare species of plants and animals and will make a terrific nature preserve. We also are excited to have the opportunity to provide public access to the scenic bluffs rising high above Lake Erie.”

Turkey Creek Metropark will provide public access to almost one mile of undeveloped Lake Erie shoreline. Approximately 80 percent of Ohio’s Lake Erie shoreline is developed or in private ownership, which makes this project even more important. Rodstrom added, “Western Reserve Land Conservancy is grateful to have assisted Ashtabula’s growing park system in the permanent preservation of this tremendous community asset along the shores of Lake Erie. We anticipate this park becoming a coastal destination for outdoor enthusiasts throughout the region, hopefully supporting Conneaut’s blossoming ecotourism industry.”

Funding to purchase the land was generously provided by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) through the Water Resources Restoration Sponsorship Program (WRRSP) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Program.

The goal of WRRSP is to counter the loss of ecological function and biological diversity that jeopardize the health of Ohio’s water resources. Entities, like the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District which sponsored the Turkey Creek Estuary project, can pursue low-interest rate-loans from the Ohio EPA Water Pollution Control Loan Fund for planning, design, or construction of wastewater, sewer, and storm-water infrastructure projects. These municipalities have the opportunity to further improve water quality by sponsoring a WRRSP project that addresses nonpoint source pollution through the protection or restoration of streams and wetlands.

NAWCA is a federally funded source of revenue to support wetland conservation projects for the benefit of waterfowl, migratory birds, and other wildlife that live in wetland habitat. The Land Conservancy successfully applied for project funding in partnership with Ducks Unlimited, and matching fund partners including the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Lorain County Metroparks, and the Ohio Department of Natural Resource’s Division of Wildlife. Special appreciation is given to Representative David Joyce for his assistance in securing the NAWCA award as well as to Senators Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman for their support.

As part of the funding requirements, the park district granted a passive park conservation easement to Western Reserve Land Conservancy to permanently conserve the land.

A comprehensive access plan is currently being developed by Ashtabula County Metroparks who hopes to provide public access to the site in the near future. 🌻

# Land Conservancy conserves first property in Holmes County

Almost fifty years to the day Philip and Joyce Balderston purchased their Holmes County property, the couple donated a conservation easement on it, permanently conserving 153 acres of working forest and agricultural land.

Philip, a sixth-generation farmer who grew up on a century farm in Iowa, saw potential in the Knox Township property. When he and Joyce purchased the property in 1967, low-grade tree species dominated the forested areas. Today, most of the property is a well-managed stand of hardwood timber with high-grade species of all age classes and a well-established understory. The Balderstons ran a maple sugaring operation for 47 years and continue to selectively timber the working forest.

It was important to the Balderstons to ensure the long-term health of their forest. Philip explained, “From the very beginning we wanted to protect our land with a restricted deed, but there was no guaranteed enforcement preventing the next owner from excessively harvesting timber. Western Reserve Land Conservancy was our answer. The conservation easement on our property will keep this a working farm forever.”

A conservation easement is a legal agreement in which a private landowner can permanently retire the development rights to his or her property, thereby preserving natural resources and keeping farm, forest, and ranch lands in productive use. The Balderstons’ conservation easement



allows for continued management of forested and agricultural lands, while protecting the forested valleys surrounding nearly one mile of tributaries to the Walhonding River, including the north fork of Black Creek.

“It is evident that the Balderstons have been tremendous land stewards,” explained Andy McDowell, vice president of western field operations for the Land Conservancy. “We are grateful to work with such thoughtful landowners and ensure their stewardship legacy.” 🌻



## 105-acre Huron County farm permanently preserved

With the help of Western Reserve Land Conservancy and the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA), Gene Kurzen ensured that his 105-acre Huron County farm along Walnut Road will be farmland forever.

The Land Conservancy recently recorded an agricultural easement on the New Haven Township property. The easement was supported through ODA’s Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) which provides funding to purchase agricultural easements from landowners who volunteer to keep their land in agricultural production in perpetuity.

More than 90 acres of Kurzen’s property is planted with a standard rotation of row crops including corn, soy, and wheat. The remaining portion of the property includes areas of pasture land, mature hardwood forest, and vegetated stream habitat. The vegetated buffers along approximately 2,800 linear feet of streams and 2,240 linear feet of grass waterway tributaries to the West Branch of the Huron River prevent soil erosion and help maintain water quality in the Huron River watershed. 🌻

## Staff Spotlight: GIS team maps success



Haley Marble (left) and Matt White (right) collaborate on GIS needs and mapping projects for the Land Conservancy.

Geographic information systems, also known as GIS, are computer systems which allow users to store, manipulate, analyze, and visualize spatial and geographic data. Western Reserve Land Conservancy utilizes GIS for one of the most critical tools in land conservation and restoration: mapmaking.

“Maps can be the most forward-facing piece of our conservation work,” explained Matt White, Director of GIS and Information Services for the Land Conservancy. “When approaching a landowner or community member about a conservation project, we know they are going to appreciate a suite of maps that can help them visualize and understand the property, its conservation values, and importance in the local landscape.”

White and GIS intern, Haley Marble, collaborate to create maps that are

used in every aspect of the Land Conservancy’s work. Maps are heavily utilized by the organization’s Land Conservation and Stewardship teams to document property conditions and boundaries, provide visual aids in grant application, and inform future conservation efforts. They are also used by the Thriving Communities team to summarize findings of citywide property surveys and depict where transformations – such as demolitions or tree plantings – have taken place in our urban communities.

“Visualizing data really makes a powerful impact, much more so than volumes of spreadsheets or numbers on a page,” noted White. The visual simplicity and clarity of a map is the end result of meticulous work and technical ability. White and Marble work diligently to gather large

## Out and About



In July, more than 75 people gathered with the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland and the Land Conservancy to celebrate the expansion of the Hach-Otis Sanctuary in Lake County.



This summer, the Land Conservancy and partner organizations teamed up with the City of Cleveland Mayor Frank G. Jackson Summer Youth Employment Program to plant, water, and care for trees.



This summer, Fairmount Santrol employees continued their tree planting efforts with the Land Conservancy in Cleveland.



More than 50 people enjoyed a gorgeous July afternoon on the Vermilion River panning for gold.

quantities of spatial data from local, state, federal, and other third-party sources. They then convert that data into comprehensive maps using GIS software.

While GIS is applicable across a variety of industries, both White and Marble were drawn to the Land Conservancy because of a desire to combine their technical skills with their passion for conservation. Drawn to the sciences, Marble explained, “I dreamed of working outdoors and doing something interactive with nature. I ultimately chose the GIS path because it is analytical and applicable to critical conservation work.”

White emphasized, “I really appreciate the fact that at the Land Conservancy my work with GIS directly supports the conservation of critical natural areas, preservation of farmland, and revitalization of urban areas. Together, we are making a tangible difference.” 🌻

## Conservation Calendar

### **Art Show featuring Julie Cook** (SEE)

Through Thursday, September 21 at the Land Conservancy Conservation Center Gallery in Moreland Hills

*Lake County artist Julie Cook's nature-inspired work is on display at the Land Conservancy through September 21.*

### **Ohio Land Bank Conference** (LEARN)

Monday, September 11 – Wednesday, September 13 in Cleveland  
*Join us for the Seventh Annual Ohio Land Bank Conference.*

### **Art Gallery Reception with Lisa Burroughs** (SEE)

Thursday, October 5 at the Land Conservancy Conservation Center Gallery in Moreland Hills, 5 - 7 PM

*Lisa Burroughs is a local artist, fine art photographer, and filmmaker. Part of her Earth's Voices series will be on display at the Land Conservancy from October 1 through December 31.*

### **Stewards Event** (CELEBRATE)

Thursday, October 19 in Lyndhurst

*At this invite-only event, we will recognize members of our White Oak Legacy Society as well as donors at the \$1,500 level and above.*

### **EverGreen EverBlue** (SUPPORT)

Saturday, November 18 at Tenk Warehouse in Cleveland

*Join us for our most important fundraising event of the year along the banks of the Cuyahoga as we reactivate historic Cleveland and revitalize our region!*

### **Sherwick Tree Steward Trainings** (LEARN)

*Check our website for the latest Sherwick Tree Steward Trainings hosted in partnership with Holden Forests & Gardens. This fall we have trainings scheduled in Cleveland's University Circle and Buckeye neighborhoods, as well as a training in Canton. Trainings are free, but advance registration is requested.*

### **Sporting Circle Group** (JOIN)

*Check our website for the latest Sporting Circle outings – including a Perch Outing on Saturday, September 9, Pheasant Outing on Saturday, September 30, and Duck Outing on Saturday, October 21 – designed to engage sportsmen and women on designated properties.*

### **Viewfinders Photography Group** (JOIN)

*Check our website for the latest Viewfinders' instructional meetings and experiential outings – including a rescheduled behind-the-scenes tour of the Medina Raptor Center and scenic fall photo hike – designed for all ages, skill levels, and camera types.*

### **Young Professionals Group** (JOIN)

*Check our website for the latest young professional engagement events designed for environmentally-conscious, sustainability-savvy, conservation-loving young professionals.*

*For more information on all of our upcoming events, visit [www.wrlandconservancy.org/events](http://www.wrlandconservancy.org/events)*



The Land Conservancy hosted members of the Land Trust Alliance's National Council for their annual retreat in June.



In July, nearly 100 people gathered to celebrate the creation of Modroo Farm Preserve in Geauga County.



## Western Reserve Land Conservancy

land • people • community

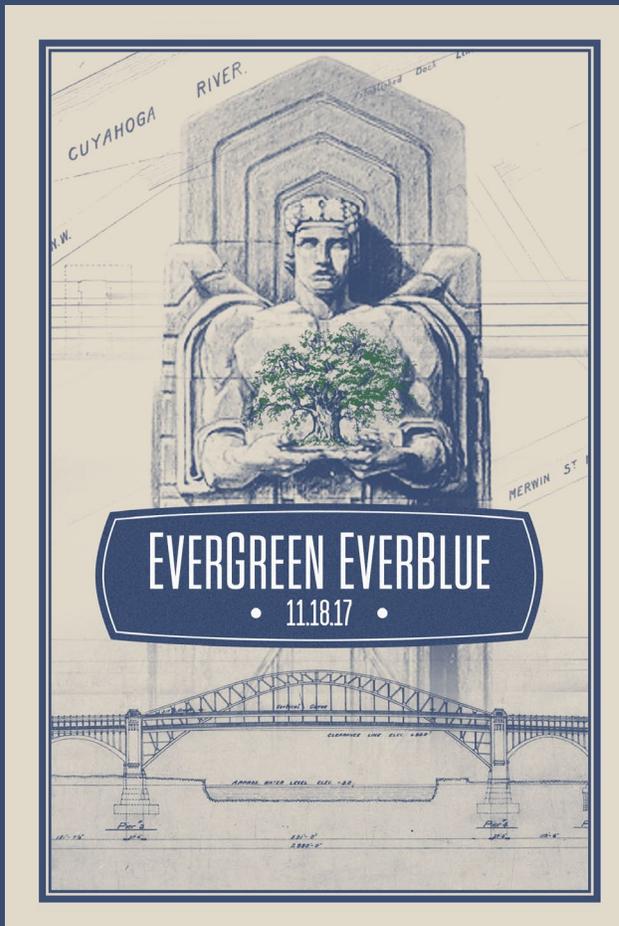
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## SAVE THE DATE

*tickets to our annual gala on sale soon!*



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