Western Reserve Land Conservancy
OUR LAND. OUR LEGACY.

A Western Reserve Land Conservancy newsletter

LANDLINE

www.wrlandconservancy.org

Winter 2014

A milestone year

Land Conservancy preserves another 4,000 acres, protects its 500th property

Western Reserve Land Conservancy had one of its most productive years in 2013, permanently preserving another 51 properties and more than 4,000 acres throughout northern and eastern Ohio.

The preserved property count was only one short of the Land Conservancy's high-water mark in 2011, while the 4,011 acres permanently protected in 2013 represented the organization's fourth-best year behind 2012 (5,525 acres), 2011 (5,524) and 2007 (5,249).

"In many ways, it has been a remarkable year for our organization and for the communities we serve," said Rich Cochran, the Land Conservancy's president and CEO. "We strive to create a cleaner and greener world that nourishes people, plants and animals, and our results in 2013 show we are making progress toward that goal. We are providing our communities with assets that, like the rising tide that lifts all vessels, give rise to enduring prosperity for all living things, including people.



The Bumb family preserved 750 acres in Huron, Erie and Sandusky counties.

We could not do this without those who support our work, and we are grateful for that support."

To date, the Land Conservancy has preserved 533 properties and 38,494 acres. The following stories highlight some of our work in 2013.

National treasure in Lake County

The Land Conservancy worked with Lake Metroparks to complete the acquisition of Lake Erie Bluffs, a nationally significant preserve with more than two miles of undeveloped shoreline in Lake County. This 600-acre park, which was opened to the public this fall, is home to 20 documented rare plant and wildlife species.

750 acres of farmland preserved in Firelands

Property owners Bob and Deborah Bumb – fifth- and sixth-generation farmers, respectively – granted conservation easements to the Land Conservancy preserving 750 acres of farmland in Huron, Erie and Sandusky counties. The Bumbs granted a total of 11 conservation easements. The easements marked the first protected properties in Sandusky County for the Land Conservancy, and the properties contain some of the most fertile soils in Ohio.

Rare bog preserved in Portage County

Near Kent, a rare sphagnum peat bog – a remnant of the last ice age – was preserved as the result of a project completed by the Land Conservancy and Portage Park District. The 58-acre Franklin Bog, located in Franklin

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Trees, land banks and demolition funding help our neighborhoods

Thriving Communities Institute, the urban revitalization arm of the Land Conservancy, continued to move Ohio cities from vacancy to vitality in 2013 by helping establish land banks, secure funding for home demolition and support programs to enhance neighborhoods.

"Even though we have only been in existence for three years, Thriving Communities has impacted communities all across Ohio," said Jim Rokakis, director of the program. "It is essential we remove vacant structures and replace them with healthy land and water resources, and that we address the overabundance of sub-standard housing and the need to remove structures that are no longer habitable."

Our work has gained national attention, including features on "60 Minutes" and in *The Washington Post.*

Network of Ohio land banks grows

With the addition of new land banks in Ashtabula and Richland counties, there are now 17 such entities in Ohio. Thriving Communities

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Our reforestation program took root in Cleveland.

Township, is adjacent to Akron's 2,334-acre Lake Rockwell Reservoir, from which the city draws drinking water.

Conservation easement protects agricultural land

In Lorain County, Lawry Babbit preserved 211 acres of farmland in Rochester Township within the Black River watershed. The farm – part of a 1,700-acre operation that produces corn, wheat and soybeans to support a large black angus beef herd – is between three other properties on which the Land Conservancy holds conservation easements. This project was also made possible by funding from ODA's Clean Ohio AEPP.

Grand River watershed gets additional protection

In northwestern Trumbull County, we preserved a 151-acre parcel that is surrounded on three sides by the Grand River Wildlife Area, a 7,450-acre preserved owned and managed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife. The protected property, which is currently being managed as a nature preserve, is in the southern portion of the Grand River watershed in Farmington Township.

Collaboration with Cleveland Metroparks

In Cuyahoga County, the Land Conservancy helped Cleveland Metroparks acquire the 30-acre Sulphur Springs Headwaters property in Solon. The project protects more than a mile of headwater streams feeding the South Branch of Sulphur Creek, a coldwater tributary to the Chagrin River where native brook trout may one day be reintroduced.

Landowner acts 'to make sure it is preserved'

Stark County landowner Vince Goff preserved his 80-acre farm with a conservation easement donated to the Land Conservancy. The retired University of Akron employee, who raises sheep, cattle and Belgian horses on the farm, said he wanted "to make sure it is preserved. I would hate to see it broken up into five-acre lots." The farm is southeast of Massillon.

Parkland acquired in Mahoning County

The Land Conservancy's work with Mill Creek Metroparks enabled the park district to acquire a 58-acre parcel in Mahoning County's Green Township. It was the Land Conservancy's largest project to date in Mahoning County.

Grain farm preserved in Huron County

Another 568 acres of farmland were protected in Huron County when Scott and Kathy Butts granted conservation easements to the Land Conservancy. The protected property, located in Hartland Township, is the base of operations for a 2,800 acre grain farm that includes land in Huron and Lorain counties. The property is primarily active agricultural land but also includes wooded areas containing forested wetlands and sits nearly on the divide between the Vermilion and Huron River watersheds.

A green corridor through Medina

In Medina Township, the Land Conservancy partnered with the Medina County Park District to acquire the 87-acre Medina Marsh property off Fenn Road. The parkland is the latest link in a two-mile, 600-acre corridor of conserved land in Medina Township and the city of Medina.

Multi-generational farm preserved in Erie County

In eastern Erie County, John Nuhn preserved a total of 563 acres of predominantly rich agricultural land in an area his family has farmed for generations. Three conservation easements granted to the Land Conservancy preserved farmland in Florence and Vermilion townships. The property is currently used for grain production and is part of a larger grain operation across hundreds of additional acres.

Land, heron rookery preserved in Lorain Co.

In Lorain County, the Land Conservancy permanently preserved an 88-acre property containing a heron rookery and a section of the East Branch of the Black River. The land, which is in Grafton and LaGrange townships, has become part of the Lorain County Metro Parks system.

Farm, greenhouse operation protected under AEPP

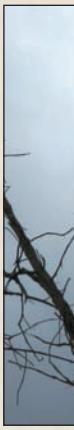
In Richland County, the Land Conservancy helped preserve a 154-acre grain farm and greenhouse operation. A conservation easement now protects the Daron family farm, which is northwest of Mansfield. It was the first farm in Richland County to be accepted into the Ohio Department of Agriculture's Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP).



Lake Erie Bluffs features more than two miles of undeveloped shorelin



Our crew surveyed all structures in Lorain.



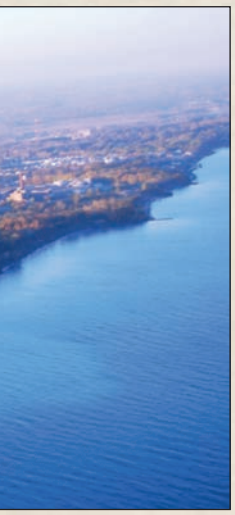
A heron
Marsh.



Franklin Bog is a remnant of the last ice age.



Our tree program was kicked off in Cleveland's Central neighborhood.



e.



Lawry Babbit preserved 211 acres of farmland.



rookery is nestled in Medina



The Butts family preserved a grain farm in Huron County.

CONSERVATION CALENDAR

Winter Ecology Tour
10 a.m. Saturday, March 1

See how our woodland critters survive and deal with northern Ohio winters in a visit to our Ashcroft Woods Preserve in Ashtabula County.

EverUrban
7-11 p.m. Saturday, April 26

Fundraiser at the renovated Ariel International Center , 1163 E. 40th Street, Cleveland, will support our urban revitalization efforts.

Adam's Run Cleanup
Saturday, April 26

Spend a morning helping to clean up this southeast Akron greenway.

Grand River Cleanup
Saturday, May 17

Help keep the State Scenic Grand River clean by removing trash and debris. We'll meet at Hidden Valley Metropark Park in Lake County's Madison Township.

Visit www.wrlandconservancy for details or email kbihler@wrlandconservancy.org.

Neighborhoods
continued

Institute and Rokakis, who, as Cuyahoga County treasurer, crafted the state law enabling the creation of county land banks, have been the driving forces behind this movement. County land banks can safely hold distressed properties until they can be put back into productive use.

Helping state land Hardest Hit Funds

Thriving Communities and Rokakis worked with the United States Department of the Treasury to make $60 million in federal Hardest Hit funds available for demolition in Ohio. The Hardest Hit Fund was established in 2008 as a foreclosure prevention tool for 18 states identified as being hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis, but by 2013 very little of the allocated resources were spent. Using preliminary results of a research study commissioned by Thriving Communities Institute, Treasury Department officials agreed to make a portion of the funds available for demolition.

Tree program gets off to a good start

Green it Up!, a full-fledged partnership between Thriving Communities, the city of Cleveland Office of Sustainability, Davey Resource Group, Burton Bell Carr Development, Inc., United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service and Keep Ohio Beautiful, got under way in November when about 30 residents and communities volunteers planted trees in Cleveland's Central neighborhood. This initiative will involve mapping our current green resources, assessing what shape they are in and identifying where we can plant new trees. We will also be teaching local residents how to properly care for their trees and green spaces.

Outdoor education lab envisioned for wetland

In 2013, the Land Conservancy partnered with the village of Highland Hills, raising more than $400,000 in federal funding to acquire and protect a 10-acre wetland. This project presented a rare opportunity to preserve wetland habitat and upland forest buffers in central Cuyahoga County, one of Ohio's most densely developed counties. Once the project is complete, the village will manage it as a nature preserve and provide public access for passive recreational use. It will also serve as an outdoor education laboratory for the Warrensville Heights School District.

Frank Ford joins Thriving Communities

In 2013, Frank Ford, a nationally renowned vacant property researcher and chairman of the Vacant and Abandoned Property Action Council (VAPAC), joined the Thriving Communities staff as senior policy advisor. Ford is an authority on vacancy and recently completed a study for Harvard University – one that determined nearly one out of every three Cleveland homes sold by banks after mortgage foreclosures end up condemned, abandoned, boarded up or demolished, and the failure rate for these transactions is higher for larger investors and out-of-state buyers.

One survey complete, many more to come

We completed our first vacant property survey in Lorain, where residents supplied with electronic parcel data and mobile devices walked the streets to evaluate the city's 28,000 parcels. A detailed report was then submitted to the city. In the wake of this project, Thriving Communities has received numerous requests to do surveys in other cities, including Akron, Cleveland, East Cleveland, Sandusky and Mansfield.

Helping Ohio receive Chase settlement funds

When JPMorgan Chase agreed in late 2013 to a settlement of mortgage fraud claims brought by the U.S. Department of Justice, Thriving Communities' Ford and Rokakis began pulling together a broad coalition of civic organizations and public officials to fight for Ohio's share of the funds. The result was the recently unveiled Ohio Plan, which calls for the state to receive $200 million for the razing of dilapidated properties throughout the state, programs to prevent home foreclosure and abandonment, the renovation of blighted homes and the re-purposing of vacant parcels resulting from demolition.

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3850 Chagrin River Road
Moreland Hills, Ohio 44022

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First EverUrban event is April 26 in Cleveland

Word on the street is we're having a party. It's true. After three years of creating land banks, securing demolition money and working to clean and green Ohio's cities, Thriving Communities Institute is kicking back. We invite you to our first EverUrban, an evening of neighborhood-inspired food, cool tunes and great conversation as we reflect on the journey from vacancy to vitality – and the challenges we still face.

EverUrban will take place from 7-11 p.m. on Saturday, April 26 at the Ariel International Center, 1163 E. 40th Street, Cleveland. The location itself is part of the urban revitalization story – the historic and renovated former Leff Electric building is now a destination spot for international businesses and cultural events.

Join us in celebrating our collective successes with an inspiring group of people who are working tirelessly to make Ohio's cities more vibrant places to live, work and play. Together, neighborhood groups, urban redevelopment organizations, governments, corporations and residents are cleaning and greening our cities.

Attending the event is your chance to support our work to create cleaner, safer and more vibrant neighborhoods throughout the state. Tickets, which are $150 per person, are available by calling (440) 528-4162 or emailing kbihler@wrlandconservancy.org.

Honorary chairman for the event is Jim Rokakis, director of Thriving Communities Institute. In 2011, Western Reserve Land Conservancy formed Thriving Communities in response to the foreclosure crisis that left thousands of vacant and abandoned homes in its wake. Since then, Thriving Communities, under the leadership of nationally recognized expert Rokakis, has helped establish county land banks throughout Ohio, secured more than $182 million for demolition of vacant and abandoned homes, started doing vacant property surveys for communities and launched a pilot tree-planting program in Cleveland.

EverUrban is your chance to mingle with others who are making a difference. Don't miss it!

Save the date! **EverGreen EverBlue** returns on September 12th.

Contact Western Reserve Land Conservancy

Central Office

3850 Chagrin River Road
Moreland Hills, Ohio 44022
(440) 528-4150 or
info@wrlandconservancy.org

Field Offices

Akron Field Office
34 Merz Boulevard, Suite G
Akron, Ohio 44333
Phone: 330-836-2271

Chardon Field Office
102 East Park Street
Chardon, Ohio 44024

Medina Field Office
141 Prospect Street
Medina, Ohio 44256
Phone: 330-722-7313

Firelands Field Office
P.O. Box 174
Oberlin, Ohio 44074
Phone: 440-774-4226

Wayne County Field Office
140 East Market Street
Suite 150
Orrville, Ohio 44667

Thriving Communities Institute
2012 W. 25th Street
Suite 504
Cleveland, Ohio 44113
Phone: 216-515-8300

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