



the washtenaw land trust journal

A publication of the Washtenaw Land Trust • Volume 4 • Number 1 • Spring, 2005

land protected

Conservation easements • 1446 acres
Nature preserves • 139 acres
Land transfers • 122 acres
Total acres • 1,708

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Conservation Easement Deductions Under Attack

Join the Fight to Protect Private Conservation

Story by the Land Trust Alliance and the Washtenaw Land Trust

On January 27, 2005, a report released by the Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation shocked the land trust community by proposing major decreases in the federal tax deductions for conservation easements and bargain sales. The proposal, if adopted, would end the work of land trusts as we know it.

The land trust community is engaged in a vigorous response. But to succeed, we need the help of every friend, staff member and board member.

The New Tax Proposals

The Joint Committee has proposed that deductions for conservation easements be limited to 33% of appraised value. No deduction will be allowed for the donation of an easement on land used for a personal residence. The Committee also proposes changing the deductions associated with donations or bargain sales of land by limiting such donations to the owner's "basis" – that is, the cost of the land plus any capital improvements made over the years.

The recommendations unfairly withhold tax deductions for charitable contributions of land or conservation easements – deductions that are enjoyed by donors making donations to non-profits for the public good in numerous other circumstances.

The Impact on Conservation

The current national policies represent 30 years of carefully considered, legislatively created incentives that provide a way for private landowners to voluntarily protect conservation values on their land for the benefit of the general public. Across the country roughly 1,400 land trusts and conservancies have protected many million acres of land – in the case of donations, at no cost for acquisition.

The Joint Committee's recommendations would virtually eliminate incentives for landowners who voluntarily conserve their lands, would end the long record of community benefits from land trusts, and would severely hamper state, county and local conservation efforts.



Photos by: Nancy Parachini, Janaé Reneaud, Suzanne Brucker Heiney

See Conservation, page 7

OUR MISSION: Washtenaw Land Trust protects farmland and natural areas in and around Washtenaw County.

Far Country

By Susan Lackey
WLT Executive Director



Hello!

There's always the pesky question about how to introduce yourself to an entirely new group of people. Obviously, I've opted for the straightforward approach.

Thanks to the tyranny of publishing deadlines, I write this well before I actually begin my tenure as Executive Director at the Land Trust. So, I can't tell you what the first days will be like. I can tell you that I'm excited about the challenge of making a lasting impact on a community I've come to love over the past 11 years.

More than a few people have asked me why I've chosen this direction. I suspect more than a few have also asked why the Board chose me. In answer to both those questions, I have an observation, an experience and a bit of personal philosophy to share.

First the observation. I spent my childhood on a small farm in Southwest Michigan and was influenced greatly by the conversations my father and I would have as we walked around the land. Two of the lessons he taught me have led me where I am today. First, you don't waste things that are in finite supply, and nothing is as finite as the land. Second, recognize that most things won't matter in a hundred years - and spend your time on the things that will matter. Surely, land conservation does.

Second, the experience. My first weekend in Washtenaw County, I was out exploring my new home. I wandered into Freedom Township. What I saw convinced me that I could be at home here. Unlike the farm community of my youth, land didn't lie fallow, and barns weren't empty, there were working farms. The loss of the economy that makes working farms viable should be of great concern to all of us who live in this community.

Finally, the personal philosophy, which may address why the Board chose me for the job. I believe that all of the various elements of my career - planning, economic development, and, now, land conservation - focus on one thing: creating communities that we can be proud to be a part of, now and in the future. I also believe that we can achieve and maintain those communities only when we reach out and form sometimes-unlikely partnerships. The voluntary nature of the Land Trust provides a unique and important forum to do this.

All in all, I think this is a natural progression in my career, or perhaps closing a loop. Some of my early planning work revolved around farmland issues, including PA 116. My first economic development projects were ag-tourism and value added food processing, while other projects focused on urban infill and redevelopment programs that reduced development pressure.

I know that the position of Executive Director of the Land Trust has the feel of 'right place; right time', and I look forward with anticipation to working with all of you on those "100-year" issues.

Notes From The Land

Land Preservation Ballot Successes

Scio Township voters overwhelmingly approved a .5-mill levy last November to protect farmland and open space. To apply to the program, township Interim Manager John Hansen encourages landowners to send the township a letter with "who you are and what you've got!"

The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation vote passed 2 to 1 to renew operating funds for maintaining the county's park system.

In Meridian Township (Ingham), voters approved two millage extensions totaling .5983-mills for pedestrian and bicycle pathways and for parks.

While the land preservation votes in Bridgewater Township and Augusta Township did not succeed, overall, the trend looks good. According to the Trust for Public Land's Land Vote Database, 78 percent of conservation ballot measures have passed since 1996, raising over \$31 billion for land conservation.

Natural Areas Preservation Program accepting nominations

The current round of nominations to the Washtenaw County Natural Areas Preservation Program is open now through June 30, 2005. For information, contact Tom Freeman at 734-971-6337, extension 323.

Park linkages a top priority

A "coordinated and connected parks and open space system" was identified as the top priority of the Washtenaw Metro Alliance (WMA), which includes leaders from Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, the townships of Ann Arbor, Pittsfield, Scio, Superior, and Ypsilanti, and

Washtenaw County. For more information on this initiative, visit www.ewashtenaw.org and search for "Washtenaw Metro Alliance."

Ann Arbor Greenbelt accepting applications

Applications are being accepted to the City of Ann Arbor's Greenbelt Program. For more information, visit www.ci.ann-arbor.mi.us and search for "Greenbelt" or call 734-997-1316.

Waterloo Recreation Area boundaries confirmed

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has confirmed the desired project boundaries for the Waterloo Recreation Area and other DNR land. To view maps by county, visit www.michigan.gov/dnr and search for "Maps "Project Boundaries"." Washtenaw Land Trust is identifying and prioritizing Waterloo-area parcels to help protect this beautiful region.

Milan-Saline Greenway moves ahead

The local governments along the Saline River are working with interested citizens and local landowners on a potential Milan-Saline Greenway that would protect this river corridor. The Washtenaw Land Trust Board of Trustees is proud to endorse this initiative.

Jackson Plan to include preservation

Language for the Jackson County agriculture preservation and purchase of development rights component of the new Master Plan is being refined. Jackson County residents should contact their commissioners to urge the adoption of strong preservation language in this plan.

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LAND TRUST ALLIANCE

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WLT Applies for 3rd Federal Grant

The Washtenaw Land Trust has applied to the 2005 cycle of the Federal Farm & Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP.) This program provides matching funds to local governments and non-governmental organizations like the land trust for the preservation of prime farmland. This year, the program has a budget of \$110 million nationwide, of which \$3 million is allocated to Michigan.

The land trust was awarded a grant to protect the Carolyn Strieter farm in Freedom Township in 2002. Then, in 2003, the land trust was awarded a second grant to protect the Jim & Charlotte Vershum dairy farm in Bridgewater Township. The land trust is actively fundraising to meet its portion of the 3-to-1 match for this project, which is scheduled to be completed this year.

This year, the land trust has applied to protect up to 171 acres on two working farms, one outside of Saline and another near Dexter.

This round of applications is expected to be quite competitive, with applications likely from the City of Ann Arbor's Greenbelt Program, Ann Arbor Township, and the State of Michigan. Parcels are selected based on the merits of the land itself, considering factors such as parcel size and soil quality.

"We hope that the Washtenaw County area succeeds at protecting many parcels during this round," said Maureen Martin, Projects Chair at the land trust. "It's great that more and more farmers are interested in these state and federal resources, and that we have an environment locally that values farmland preservation."

The State of Michigan's Agricultural Preservation Fund will also be accepting applications this year. Local interest is high; more than 70 township officials, landowners, and other interested parties attended Washtenaw Land Trust's workshop about this program last November. The tentative timeline for 2005 pre-qualification is April 1 - September 15, with applications accepted September 15 - November 1.

Upcoming Events

Stewardship Workday and Hike Sunday, May 15, 2 pm - 5 pm. Join us at the land trust's Sharon Hills Nature Preserve for a clean-up. Followed at 4:00 pm by a short presentation on hawks (including seeing a live red-tail!) plus a guided hike with a naturalist. Please call for directions and to confirm- 734.302.LAND(5263).

Farmland Preservation Celebration Saturday, May 21, 1 pm - 5:30 pm. You are invited to hop on our chartered coach to tour two recently protected farms:

- The Bassett/DeLoof farm, protected through the State PDR program
- The Yingling/Community Farm of Ann Arbor farm, protected by a conservation easement.

See a spring-fed kettle lake, learn about composting, and tour traditional farm buildings. Space is limited. For information and to reserve a seat, call 734.302.LAND(5263).

Estate Planning & Land Protection Strategies Workshop Thursday, September 22. Steve Small, the nation's foremost expert on estate planning for private land protection, will lead a morning workshop targeted to professional advisors (lawyers, accountants, estate planners, financial planners, etc.) If you or someone you know would benefit from this workshop, please contact us at 734.302.LAND(5263), and we will add the name to our invitation list.

Across the Board

By Theresa Schenk
President



This summer we had an aerial picture taken of our farm. The company, State Aerial, flew around the area farms in an airplane, taking pictures from many different views. A month or so later they showed us the proof photographs of our farm, from which we could choose a photo to have blown up into a large picture or oil painting to proudly display on our wall. It is a farm tradition to purchase such pictures to track the changes on the farm over time.

I know I am biased, but I think our recent aerial photos are breathtaking. The most intriguing view for me was the one taken from the west facing east toward Ann Arbor.

You see, we are the last Ann Arbor address on our road, and we are a full 10 miles past the greenbelt boundary. The view shows the farmstead and all its outbuildings, the freshly planted fields, the other adjacent farms, and then you begin to see the density of development that is the city of Ann Arbor.

A picture is indeed worth a thousand words! This view for me testifies to the need to maintain contiguous working farms beyond the development of the city and demonstrates that there is indeed a healthy farm economy that should remain a part of the diversity of our economic fabric in this community. City and country can peacefully co-exist, and I would argue that their inter-dependence is the best of both worlds.

This aerial view also makes the case for why the land trust works beyond the greenbelt, focusing strategically on the areas that have the potential to retain working farms that will sustain an agricultural economy.

Your support means WLT can focus on areas of the county not covered by ballot initiatives, filling a unique niche in the land protection community. I humbly thank you for your vision and support of the land trust's mission.



State Aerial Farm Statistics, Inc.

The Schenk farm, looking east toward the city of Ann Arbor. The Schenks donated an easement to the land trust last December to protect the 18 acre woodlot on their farm.

Protecting Our Land, Preserving Our Legacy

Story by Suzanne Brucker Heiney

Thanks to a generous donation by Sharon Township (Washtenaw) landowners Reno & Nancy Feldkamp, 40 acres of land will be protected forever.

"We wanted the property to remain in the same peaceful state that it is now," said Reno.

"We had been thinking about it (donating an easement) for years – maybe ten or fifteen years – but we just didn't get it done," Nancy added. "Then we thought, 'We're getting older, and we better get it done!'"

The parcel has been protected by a donated conservation easement and includes 40 acres of fields, tree plantings, rolling hills, and wetlands. The Feldkamps, who moved to their 143-acre farm in 1950, have raised their family there, enjoying its scenic and agricultural setting.

"I remember chasing sheep around those hills," laughed Nancy. "We had a flock of sheep for a long time."

"It feels good being back there," said Reno. The land is currently used in part to grow hay, as well as to grow Christmas trees that Reno & Nancy sell during the holidays.

The Feldkamps said that they decided to work with the Washtenaw Land Trust because they felt that the people seemed very professional, and because they knew that the land trust had other property, the Sharon Hills Nature Preserve, "just 2 or 3 hills over."

"This is an historic milestone for the Washtenaw Land Trust," said Wayne Say, Washtenaw Land Trust Interim Executive Director. "The Feldkamps' easement donation marks the 35th property that the Washtenaw Land Trust has helped to protect. I'm pleased that they chose to work with Washtenaw Land Trust to protect their family land."

While working on this story, I asked Reno & Nancy what they would tell other landowners who are considering protecting their land.

With absolutely no hesitation, Reno responded, "Do it. Call these good people and talk with them. Find out what you want and go from there."

And then Nancy asked me to put in our phone number. So here it is: 734.302.LAND (5263).



Photo by Ann Arbor News. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Protected: Reno and Nancy Feldkamp donated a conservation easement to the Washtenaw Land Trust to preserve 40 acres of their land.

About the Feldkamp Conservation Easement

- Protects 40 acres of land in Sharon Township, Washtenaw County
- Voluntarily donated to the land trust in December 2004
- Protects biological and ecological values, including air, water, and other natural resources, by restricting development on the site
- Protects the scenic vistas, open space, and natural character along Smythe Road
- Protects wetland areas that provide habitat for aquatic invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, and aquatic and emergent vegetation

Thinking Globally, Preserving Locally



Above: Ann Arbor Mayor John Hieftje presents the Preservationist of the Year Award. Left to right: Paul Bantle, Mayor Hieftje, Karen Chalmer, Kristin VanVliet, Anne Bantle.

Left: Dean Rosina Bierbaum addresses land trust supporters at the Fall Dinner last October.

Local Food: Not just about the farmers

Growing the agriculture economy in our community

On March 8, over 100 people from five southeast Michigan counties came together to discuss the future of agriculture in southeast Michigan.

The 2005 Southeast Michigan Agricultural Economic Development Conference included presentations by Mike Score of MSU Extension, Tony VanDerworp of Washtenaw County Planning, Dr. Chris Peterson of the MSU Product Center, and Dr. Lawrence Molnar of UM's Ross School of Business. The main themes of this conference are highlighted below.

Agriculture is not just about farmers

Agriculture is more than just growing crops or raising animals. Agriculture is an important part of our local economy because it encompasses the entire system of producing and delivering food to consumers. It includes not just farming but also processing, marketing, storage, distribution, and retail sales.

In southeast Michigan (Wayne, Monroe, Lenawee, Washtenaw, and Jackson counties), the task ahead is to match the supply of food, which is strongest in the western counties, to the demand for food, which is strongest in the eastern counties.

A viable farming community benefits everyone

To keep the landscapes that we love, with vibrant cities, towns, and villages surrounded by more rural areas, our region must focus on the economic development of agriculture which makes those landscapes economically viable.

Commonly-used tools for addressing the rural/urban mix, such as preservation policy, planning, and zoning, need to be used in conjunction with market development. Initiatives and ideas include test kitchens to incubate new ideas, detailed inventories and maps of food system components (supply, demand, distribution, etc.), and strategic economic development plans.

With a strong agricultural economy, not only can our region retain the landscapes cherished by local residents, but it can remain vibrant economically, as well.

Doing nothing is not an option

The trend in U.S. agriculture is toward increasingly large farm operations and commoditization of farm products. Especially since Michigan has relatively high cost land and labor resources, our region will need to be innovative in order to remain competitive. This means increasing coordination and alliances throughout the food supply chain to create a sustainable food system.

Southeast Michigan has opportunities that many other agricultural areas do not. Our nearby population centers are an asset to our region; they have the capability to become the urban markets for the food produced by a sustainable local agricultural economy.

To learn more: Contact the land trust at 734.302.LAND(5263) or info@washtenawlandtrust.org and/or Michael DiRamio of Washtenaw County Planning at 734.222.6859 or diramiom@ewashtenaw.org. And remember to buy local!



Lima Township (Washtenaw) landowner Isabelle Joy Yingling and local community-supported agriculture operation Community Farm of Ann Arbor, who each played key roles in a 10-year project to protect 10 acres of prime organic farmland, were named co-winners of the Washtenaw Land Trust's Preservationist of the Year Award at our 2004 Annual Dinner last October.

The annual award is given to persons who substantially advance the cause of land preservation.

"Isabelle Joy Yingling and the Community Farm are to be commended for their vision and determination in protecting this farmland," said Jim Crowfoot, WLT Board Member.

"They have stepped up to ensure that this land will remain open forever. We salute them for their vision, persistence, and hard work."

Also at the Annual Dinner, the land trust hosted keynote speaker Dean Rosina M. Bierbaum of the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment.

Dean Bierbaum's speech, "Local Land Trusts: Global Context," highlighted the roles that land trusts can play in mitigating global environmental stresses and in maintaining sustainable ecosystems.

The 2005 Washtenaw Land Trust Annual Dinner is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, October 5.



Board Bio

Maureen S. Martin

Profession: Director of Foundation Relations in the Office of Development for the University of Michigan. I've been in fundraising since finishing graduate school in 1988, and actually did grantwriting and fundraising as a volunteer well before that.

Education: M.B.A. from the University of Michigan Ross School of Business, B.A. in women's studies and journalism, also from University of Michigan

Home: My husband and I share a wonderful home on a woody ridge overlooking a nice big wetland just outside greater Gregory, Michigan. We met when we both worked at the Nature Conservancy, and we married just this year. He is a magnet for stray cats, so our household also now includes five cats.

WLT Board Member Since: Early 2000. I came to know the Land Trust through my tenure at the Conservancy and in collaborating on farmland preservation – I was part of the Ag Lands task force in Washtenaw County and worked with leaders from the Land Trust on the 1998 ballot measure.

On WLT Board Because: The Land Trust offers conservation-minded people of any political stripe a way to contribute to land preservation. We are committed to private action for land conservation – bringing landowners and conservation tools together to accomplish great things. The board itself brings business leaders, farm family members, and environmentalists to one table, and that's important. I enjoy this volunteer work very much, enjoy getting to know the farm families and local landowners who love their land so much, and the donors and volunteers who keep the Land Trust going.

Signs of Our Past: Native Americans in our Region

Story by Rick Meader

It is often easy to forget that the area we call home was once covered with miles of forests, swamps and oak savanna. Early accounts by settlers and visitors to the area remarked on the park-like beauty of the oak savannas with their unending carpet of wildflowers and widely spaced oaks, or the forbidding dark forests that stretched from Dearborn to Ypsilanti, home to wolves, bear and other fearsome animals. It's also easy to forget in our developed society that south-eastern Michigan was home to a succession of Native Americans dating back thousands of years to the retreat of the glaciers, who depended on the land for their survival.

Late last year, Dr. John O'Shea of the University of Michigan's Museum of Anthropology spoke to Washtenaw Land Trust leading supporters about his work with Great Lakes archaeology. He described some of the evidence discovered in Washtenaw County that has provided clues about some of the peoples that have called this area home. Some of the examples he cited were:

- Artifacts found in the area, including stone tools, fire cracked rocks and arrowheads
- Evidence showing that Dexter Road and several other area roads are located along historic Indian trails
- A rock burial cairn dating back to 1000 A.D. found in Barton Hills; it appears to be the burial site of a special person, a leader or other high-standing person, because the cairn is so different from the typical burial sites found in this area.
- Numerous sites found along rivers, on bluffs, etc.

In order to learn what we can about prehistoric sites in Ann Arbor, the City instituted a requirement in the Subdivision and Land Use Control ordinance which states that sites facing development that meet certain criteria must undergo a review for possible historical significance.

The criteria include location of the site within a "high site potential" area map maintained by the city, the existence of a known archaeological site within a half mile of the development site, and the size of the development site (5 acres or greater).

If the site meets one of the criteria, the planning department staff will send a copy of the development proposal to the University of Michigan's Museum of Anthropology for review. If the Museum staff concludes that a field survey is necessary to document any archaeological finds, the developer will be responsible for having a field survey conducted by a qualified consultant following specifications set up by the Museum of Anthropology. If archaeological finds of significant impact are determined to exist on the site, the Planning Department may require modifications to the development plans in order to protect the finds.

This protective measure applies only to sites within the limits of the City of Ann Arbor, and the University of Michigan and the City itself are exempt from the rules. The City voluntarily abides by it, although the University does not. No other township or municipality in the County has this type of archaeological review within its land development ordinances.

We live in an area with a long history of human habitation, and sharp eyes may find new evidence of it in unexpected locations. You can learn more by visiting the University of Michigan's Museum of Anthropology online at <http://www.umma.lsa.umich.edu>, by reading books on the subject, or through visits to known historical sites. They may help you spot something significant on your next walk through a forest or field.

Rick Meader is a new volunteer with the Washtenaw Land Trust. A native Ann Arborite, he earned a Master of Landscape Architecture degree at the University of Michigan and works as a Registered Landscape Architect for Washtenaw Engineering.

Thank you...

Whole Foods Market for selecting the Washtenaw Land Trust for its "Canister Days" program, which raised over \$500 to protect the Yingling S. Fletcher Road organic farm.

Nonprofit Enterprise At Work and Washtenaw County for selecting Washtenaw Land Trust for two scholarships for NEW workshops.

Eric Kelly and all the performers at the 'On A Michigan Night' for donating the event's proceeds, nearly \$700, to the Yingling project.

Conservation,
continued from page 1

These recommendations would severely reduce private donations of land or conservation easements to permanently protect land, **and thus deny everyone the public benefits of these donations.**

Please Help Today

You must act today, because the conservation work of land trusts and conservancies in Michigan and throughout the country depends on the tax incentives the Joint Committee on Taxation has attacked.

Letters to our US Senators and Representatives asking them to help in fighting these proposals are essential. For more information, visit www.washtenawlandtrust.org.

Help turn back these harmful proposals and the damage they will do to the protection of working farms and natural areas in our communities.

Volunteers from Eastern Michigan University take a well-deserved break at Washtenaw Land Trust's Sharon Hills Nature Preserve in southwestern Washtenaw County. EMU employees posted boundaries and cleared and marked trails during Washtenaw United Way's Day of Caring last September. The land trust is grateful for their help!



TRAILBLAZERS



Make Your Voice Heard: Legislator Addresses

Sen. Chuck Grassley
Finance Committee Chair
721 Federal Building
210 Walnut St.
Des Moines, IA 50309

Rep. Bill Thomas
Ways & Means Committee Chair
4100 Empire Drive, Suite 150
Bakersfield, California 93309

Sen. Carl Levin
US Senate
124 West Allegan, Suite 1810
Lansing, MI 48933-1716

Sen. Debbie Stabenow
US Senate
221 W. Lake Lansing Rd., Suite 100
East Lansing, MI 48823

If you live in eastern Washtenaw County (House 15th District):
Rep. John Dingell
US House of Representatives
5 South Washington St.
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

If you live in western Washtenaw County, Jackson County (House 7th District):

Rep. Joe Schwarz
US House of Representatives
142 N. Mechanic St.
Jackson, MI 49201

If you live in Ingham or Livingston Counties (House 8th District):

Rep. Mike Rogers
US House of Representatives
1327 E. Michigan Ave.
Lansing, MI 48912



Are you interested in being a conservation buyer?

32 secluded acres in Webster Township at 8622 Zeeb Road, surrounded by many additional acres of conservation area. The home is a restored early American Colonial with 3 bedrooms, 2.5 baths, and pine plank flooring throughout. Asking price: \$649,900.

A portion of this property is protected with a conservation easement held by the Washtenaw Land Trust.

For more information contact Rob Ewing, 734-216-5955 or 734-741-5543.



Will Power

Bequests are a critical source of support for the Washtenaw Land Trust. Please remember the trust in your estate. Call us and we'll help make it happen.



734.302.LAND (5263)
info@washtenawlandtrust.org

The Washtenaw Land Trust
would like to thank the
following people and
organizations for their
generous support in
calendar year 2004.

Land & Easement

Donors

Isabelle Joy Yingling
Bill & Virginia McKeachie
Reno & Nancy Feldkamp
Karl & Theresa Schenk

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(\$5,000 and up)

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