

THE ACRES  
**QUARTERLY**

Winter 2024 | Vol. 63 - No. 4



**ACRES**  
LANDTRUST

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## From the Executive Director

Dear Members,

When I joined the ACRES team in 2006, we owned 3,859 acres. Now we are celebrating more than 8,000 acres of land owned. A doubling of preserved land! It took us 46 years to acquire the first 4,000 acres, and 18 years to acquire the next 4,000 acres. This doubling of preserved lands is worth celebrating!

Yet I'm not satisfied—in fact, I'm upset about our lack of success. Although 4,000 acres of high-priority land becomes available to ACRES every five years, we aren't able to acquire it due to a lack of funding. ACRES needs the capacity to acquire 4,000 acres every five—not 18—years.

### How do we get there?

The new strategic plan (see page 14) will help, but it doesn't call for us to reach that level in the next three years.

We'll get there by growing existing income streams and creating new ones. And this starts with ideas. Can you share an idea that could help us meet this need? Do you have something to add to my list below?

### ACRES Income Sources

#### Current

- Donations
- Grants
- Farm / Forestry
- Endowment
- Restoration / Mitigation

#### Potential

- Contractual Services
- Corporate
- Carbon Credits

**Natural lands in our service area are increasingly being developed. We need to protect more land while we can!**

While there are many high-quality places to protect, we lack resources to protect them.

How long it takes to acquire the next 4,000 acres is up to you, to me, and to everyone else who is part of ACRES. We can and we NEED to do this. Please share your ideas about how to do this.

Thanks,

Jason Kissel  
jkissel@acreslandtrust.org  
260-637-2273 ext. 102

Cover: Close-up of the exquisite and unique patterns formed in frozen water.

# WELCOME 42newmembers!

Andrew Anguiano & Kim Brugnoli  
 Kristi & Mark Bailey  
 Steve & Martha Beeson  
 Ian Bercau  
 Amanda & Solomon Boyce  
 Greg Brown  
 from Teresa Brown  
 Tina Butler  
 Michelle Calka & Joel Diana  
 Thomas Clendenen  
 Jamison & Ashley Czarnicki  
 Bruce & Mary Lou Edwards  
 Michael Gillman  
 from Carla Bauman  
 Lyndsey Glaze  
 from Scott & Melissa Glaze  
 Robert Griffin  
 Timothy & Carla Harding  
 Kylee & Jeremy Heinold  
 Denise Henke  
 Mary Hickman  
 Gary Hochstetler  
 Madyson Holtzinger

Luann & Steve Kurtz  
 Matt Langsen  
 Taylor & Abby Leick  
 Kendal Mansfield  
 Paul McGrath & Elizabeth Graham  
 Constance Mettler  
 Jeff and Karen Nau  
 Elten & Carolyn Powers  
 Debra Roberts  
 Rune Restaurant  
 Linda & Jeff Sampson  
 Krista Schloss & John Maxson  
 Ashley & Jacob Shively  
 Lisa & Douglas Spare  
 Beverly Thayer  
 Byron Thomas  
 Becky & Mike Travis  
 Michael Trulock  
 John & Jeanette Weis  
 Jared Wilkinson & Sasha Keck  
 Karen Wilkinson  
 from William Hostetler  
 Darlene & John Yack

## In Memory of

Willard Clark  
 from Christina Clark & Ian Dill  
 Lance Garrett  
 from Patricia & Sean Garrett  
 Dakota Neuchterlein  
 from Kristi & Mark Bailey  
 Kevin Parrish  
 from Jani Spede, Myla Jean Wells  
 Werner Reifsteck  
 from Pete Harrington  
 Carol Summers  
 from Diana Harris

John Wilkinson  
 from Kendric & Carolyn Christener, Rob & Renee Ely, Chris Freehill, Greg & Molly Gabet, Jack & Camille Garrison, Hartman & Bell Families, Kylee & Jeremy Heinold, Nancy Hormann, William Hostetler, Sharon Busick Howell, Luann & Steve Kurtz, Todd Larson, Amy & Scott Lazoff, Michael Lewis, Jennifer Lewis, & Susi Harp, Linda Lolkus & Family, Mary McCardle & Jeff Lickey, Gary & Sandy Minear, Kay Morhart, Peggy & Jeff Nelson, Charline & Dennis Nestleroad, Larry & Wendy Piano, Jerry & Joan Runyan, Jenny Sanders, Nick & Sara Spitler, Nancy & David Steinhof, Chris Welling, Paul & Mary Welling, Bill & Jill Werling, Jared Wilkinson & Sasha Keck, Darlene & John Yack

## In Honor of

Kathryn Lemish  
 from Mary Hickman  
 Marriage of Lydie Costes & Robert Pehlman  
 from Rachel Gross

Sam Schwartz's 90th Birthday  
 from Angie & Dan O'Neill



ACRES Land Trust owns and protects natural and working lands, inspiring people to value, appreciate and support these places for the benefit of all—today and forever. Today we protect and steward more than 8,000 acres in northeast Indiana and portions of southern Michigan and northwest Ohio. In addition to helping care for and restore our local land, your support also offers trail systems where you and others can explore thriving natural places from dawn to dusk, at no charge. Thank you!

1802 Chapman Road, PO Box 665 | Huntertown, IN 46748-0665  
260-637-ACRE (2273) | email: acres@acreslandtrust.org

acreslandtrust.org



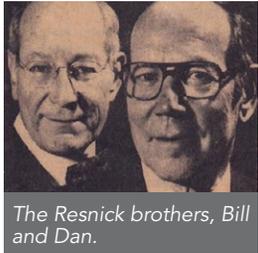
## Asherwood

by Chris Fairfield

Photo by Thomas Sprunger

In 1968, six teachers from Indiana led 13 junior high students on a Minnesota canoe trip. That adventure inspired the teachers to advocate for preserving local lands and teaching students about the benefits of nature.

They soon connected with a United Methodist church ready to pass on the care of the Asherwood Residential Church Camp. The property included 160 acres of forest, tall grass prairie, a meandering creek and indoor teaching space. What a find!



The Resnick brothers, Bill and Dan.

Fortunately, in 1972, the Marion Community School System agreed with this enthusiasm and voted to pursue the necessary \$29,000 to purchase the 160 acres of wooded land. The purchase soon became a community effort with student-led fundraisers, grant applications and donation solicitations. The Resnick Brothers, who owned the department store in the city of Marion that bore their name, anonymously donated \$21,000 in memory of their parents. Their donation secured the effort. The Resnick bequest also came with forward-thinking

specific requests and deed restrictions: the land would keep the Asherwood name and would be kept as forest for at least 50 years, and if the property were to be sold, 72% of the proceeds would purchase another educational property.

The school system also wisely chose Dr. Jerry Sweeten as the Asherwood Director and Naturalist. He served 25 years, from 1977 to 2004. He and a science curriculum committee created a comprehensive Indiana-compliant outdoor education plan. Science, math, technology, language arts and character-building were taught through sensory activities for grades 1 through 12. Fourth graders studied Indiana history during maple syrup season. Sixth graders participated in bird banding at the aviary. Students with special needs visited Asherwood for life skill courses. High schoolers focused on forestry, forest management, stream study and maple syrup chemistry.

At one point, the property hosted about 4,000 Marion Community students a year. Dr. Sweeten recalls, "While it was only a 20-mile trip, it may as well have been thousand miles away." For some, it was a first experience with a forest, a time and place for "observations, inquiry, art and plenty of time for experiential learning." Dr. Sweeten recalls that "the Asherwood program worked well and changed lives."



Photo by Thomas Sprunger

The maple syrup sugar house was built by Loren Elliott on an adjoining property. His daughter donated it to Asherwood in 1978 and the Youth Conservation Corps then relocated it to Asherwood and added a woodshed.

While meandering past Asher Creek, students and visitors encountered over 100 species of woody plants and wildflowers, more than 135 bird species and many mammals, insects, amphibians and reptiles.

Asherwood was also open to local private schools and to colleges and universities. The public accounted for approximately 2,000 additional annual visitors. The Friends of Asherwood organization began as a vocational continuing education class and grew strong, sometimes with over 100 people attending meetings. This group funded the current classroom building and the parking lot.

As time passed, each Marion Community Schools administrative change and budget cut brought more uncertainty to the land's status. In 1987, Dr. Sweeten successfully advocated for the State of Indiana's dedication of 60 of the 160 acres worthy of permanent preservation, including the most mature forest and a stream. And yes, curriculums and administrations did change. Budget cuts prevailed. Marion Community Schools found it necessary to seek another group to care for this special place in perpetuity. Friends of Asherwood advocated for ACRES to care for this land where future generations of students and their families could continue to be inspired to learn about the land.

In 2010, ACRES entered into a contractual agreement to manage the property for Marion Community Schools and then take ownership of the property in 2024. For the past 14 years, and for many years to come, ACRES will carry on the dream of that original group of teachers from 1968. ACRES continues to host school classes, group outings, families, and individual hikers. ACRES members of all ages enjoy special Asherwood outings, sugar bush tours and maple syrup production demonstrations. ACRES also partners with many organizations to continue research, recreation and respite at Asherwood. Dr. Sweeten calls Asherwood "...an island in an agriculturally dominated landscape." Under ACRES protection in perpetuity, the land and water of Asherwood will continue to offer quality habitat. Its inhabitants, migrators and visitors will continue to benefit from its free-flowing waters, wooded shelter and prairie sun.

**Learn about how ACRES is utilizing Asherwood to better service our region on page 15.**

## LASALLE FAMILY NATURAL AREA

# LaSalle family donates 75 acres in the Cedar Creek Corridor

by Bridgette Hernandez

**"I never really thought of this place as my land," said Amanda LaSalle as she sat next to her husband, Bill, in the kitchen of the home they have shared for more than 30 years.**

The log cabin style house stands in the woods on a bluff overlooking Cedar Creek in northern Allen County. Outside the LaSalle kitchen window, a half dozen goldfinches cling to a bird feeder, enjoying the warmth of a sunny September afternoon. Amanda explained that the land has never felt like a possession to be sold or developed: "I always felt it should be exactly the way it is."

In planning their estate, the couple wanted to ensure the land would keep its natural integrity, so they reached out to ACRES to donate their property for permanent protection. The newly-protected LaSalle Family Natural Area preserves 75 acres of woodland along Cedar Creek. Funding to cover closing costs and administrative expenses associated with this project was provided by the Ardelle and Theresa Glaze Foundation.

This land is part of the Cedar Creek Corridor, the largest forested corridor remaining in the county. Carved by glaciers, the area's topography defies what is typical in this region known for its flat farmland. Steep ravines cut through the forest, and much of Cedar Creek flows through a canyon that averages 82 feet in depth.

As one of ACRES 10 priority areas, the Corridor encompasses nearly 2,000 acres of permanently protected land, with ACRES alone protecting nearly 1,240 acres. Stewardship Director Evan Hill explained that protecting contiguous high-quality natural areas is extremely important in maintaining a healthy, functioning ecosystem.

"These larger areas offer a mosaic of plant communities, and as such, the Cedar Creek Corridor boasts one of the highest levels of biodiversity within all of Allen County," Hill said.

Hill looks forward to sending a botanist to the property to survey the present plant species.

"Given its proximity to a few known populations of state rare, threatened and endangered species, we suspect our planned botanical inventories will turn up a few of these species as well," he said.



Photo by Thomas Sprunger



## A CONNECTION TO THE LAND

The LaSalles' connection to the land goes back to the 1950s when Amanda's aunt and uncle, Connie and Howard Weikart, first moved to the area. Amanda and her brothers had enjoyed visiting as children.

In the late 1970s, Amanda and Bill started buying property from the Weikarts and later built their home on the land. For the last three decades, Bill, an orthopedic surgeon, and Amanda, a ballet teacher, have enjoyed being surrounded by nature.

The couple enjoys hiking and identifying woodland wildflowers, like the yellow lady's slipper Amanda found growing on a steep hillside.

"I love the woods. It's nice and quiet, and you see a lot of wildlife," said Bill, an avid bowhunter. Besides deer, they've spotted families of turkeys, plenty of groundhogs and sometimes, a fox.

A variety of birds visit their feeders, including the pileated woodpecker. Migrating birds also stop by, including the rose-breasted grosbeak and scarlet tanager.

The landscape inspired Amanda's maternal grandfather, artist Ole Sundsmo. Several of his watercolors of Cedar Creek hang in their home. One special piece depicting a rocky bluff above the creek was painted long before Amanda and Bill built their home on that exact spot.

## PROTECTING LAND WITH ACRES

Preserving natural areas and farmland is important to the LaSalles, especially amid the rapid development that continues to transform the surrounding area.

"We saw the development going on out here," Amanda said. "This would be prime development land. We didn't want to see that happen."

They learned about ACRES conservation work from a neighbor who also intends to protect their land with the nonprofit. Knowing the natural area won't be sold or developed gives them peace of mind. Their children and extended family members share their enthusiasm about the donation.

As part of their donation agreement, the LaSalles will continue to live on the property and retain land use rights. (The LaSalle Family Natural Area is closed to the public.)

Hill said working with land donors like the LaSalles is one of the best parts of his job.

"Getting to experience the property with the donors and seeing how much it means to them is special. Being entrusted with the property is an honor, and we all look forward to stewarding the property for years to come," he said.

The LaSalles hope their story will inspire others to consider protecting their land with ACRES.

"If you live or own property within an ACRES priority area, there is a chance you might have something pretty special," Hill said. "Donating a property anywhere within the ACRES service area is extremely generous, and we understand this may not be an option for everyone. If you are interested in hearing options on how you can protect your property and how ACRES may be able to help accomplish that goal, we encourage you to reach out."

**\*See the Fall 2024 Quarterly for a complete list of priority areas.**

## Heinzerling-Ditmer Natural Area

**ACRES emphasizes stewarding not only land, but also relationships. Lifelong connections sometimes lead to permanent protection of more than one property. When the Heinzerling family sensed it was time to sell their 62-acre woodland in southern DeKalb County, they again felt motivated to contact ACRES.**

The family name may sound familiar because they worked with ACRES on permanently protecting the Heinzerling Family Five Points Nature Preserve 10 years ago, in 2014. Many of you have enjoyed the property's trail and quiet forest, particularly in the springtime with its incredible display of wildflowers. Through a generous bargain sale, the Heinzerling Family Five Points Nature Preserve has been expanded by 62 acres, now making the property 178 acres. The added tract is named the Heinzerling-Ditmer Natural Area.

"Ten years ago we took the first step in protecting our family's land by creating the Heinzerling Family Five Points Nature Preserve. This recent expansion has extended the joy and peace of mind we feel about preserving our family's land legacy," the siblings stated.

The Heinzerling family has a rich history with the property, particularly with its conservation. Childhoods were spent playing in the woods and creek and admiring the abundant wildlife. A large portion of the property was farmed until 2012, when 22 acres were placed into the Wetland Reserve Program. Through that program, those 22 acres were restored to valuable wetland habitat. Then in 2021, the remaining six acres of farm ground were placed in the Conservation Reserve Program. Trees were planted to create habitat for the federally endangered Indiana Bat.

The property includes upland forests, a new tree planting, restored wetlands and a diverse bottomland forest. The forests contain a diverse overstory of white and red oak, blue ash, sugar maple and black walnut. Nodding trillium, red trillium, various sedges and blue-eyed Mary carpet the forest floor, the latter flower not documented in the county since Charles Deam did so in 1908.

The property is also a haven for wildlife. Waterfowl use the wetlands as a resting place, and beavers find refuge and plentiful food in the abundant willows. Blue herons and belted kingfishers hunt for fish along the banks of Black Creek. Nearly 2,000 feet of the north and south banks of Black Creek (a key tributary of Cedar Creek to the east), are protected within the property.

Stewardship plans for the property include prioritizing invasive management, caring for the restored wetlands, and tree planting. The property falls into the "protected lands" land-holding category, meaning that ACRES will never sell or divide the tract of land, although it includes working lands like farms and timber plantings. This land category allows ACRES to consider a future sustainable timber harvest to promote healthy habitat development and offset land stewardship costs on the property.

## A Smart Way to Give Later in Life

Many ACRES supporters are already enjoying retired life. They've built up savings to support them in their later years, including an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) to provide an income stream in retirement.

The IRS requires IRA owners to take annual withdrawals starting at age 73, even if they don't want or need to. Not taking these withdrawals can lead to hefty penalties, a concern for many retirees. Depending on the type of IRA, this withdrawal may also be taxed.

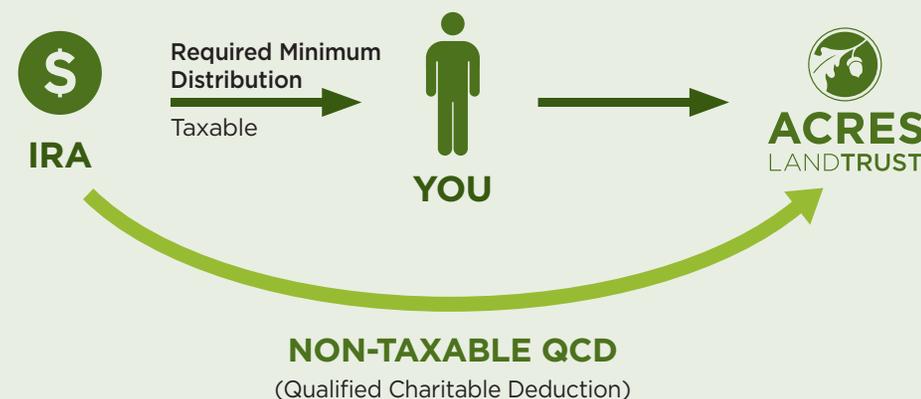
### HOW DOES IT WORK?

One option for those aged 70½ and older who wish to support charities is the **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)**, also known as a charitable IRA rollover. This allows IRA owners to annually transfer up to \$105,000 directly to qualifying charities without being counted as taxable income. Couples filing jointly can each make QCDs, potentially totaling \$210,000 annually.

QCDs not only fulfill withdrawal requirements but also help reduce adjusted gross income. This reduction can lower the taxable portion of Social Security benefits and affect eligibility for certain deductions and credits. Since QCDs don't need to be reported as taxable income, they can provide greater tax benefits than traditional cash donations. This makes QCDs an effective strategy for charitably-minded retirees looking to maximize their philanthropic impact while managing their tax burden.

### HOW TO MAKE A QCD

Qualified charitable distributions are made directly to the eligible charity. The funds are transferred from your account to the organization electronically or by mailing a check to the charity. A QCD must be made by the same deadline as a normal distribution, usually December 31, to count toward your required minimum annual IRA distribution.



*Many retirees are weighing their options during this season of giving. Please get in touch with your financial advisor if you want to make a QCD to ACRES Land Trust.*

Photo spread on pages 10–11: A soft blanket of fog envelops Cedar Creek.



RSVP for events by visiting [acreslandtrust.org/events](https://www.acreslandtrust.org/events) or calling 260-637-2273.

## INDIAN RIVER NATURE PRESERVE 25TH ANNIVERSARY PRESENTATION

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2-3 pm**

ALLEN COUNTY | ACRES Land Trust Office

Celebrate 25 years of permanent protection at Indian River Nature Preserve! This 29 acre LaGrange County preserve, acquired December 29, 1999, features wetland along the Dallas Lake chain. Due to its location and sensitive habitat, we are celebrating with an informative presentation instead of a site visit!

Join archive volunteer Chris Fairfield to learn about the history of this acquisition, and ACRES Stewardship Director Evan Hill to hear how this preserve is an important addition to one of ACRES priority areas. Space is limited. **RSVP by December 27.**

## FIRST HIKES

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1**

Ring in the New Year with invigoration! We'll explore trails across the region, welcoming 2025 with movement and camaraderie.

**10 am** ALLEN COUNTY | Fogwell Forest  
9630 Whippoorwill Dr, Fort Wayne, IN 46809

**2 pm** HUNTINGTON COUNTY | Tel-Hy  
1429 N 300 W, Huntington, IN 46750



## WINTER CREEK STOMP FOR ACRES MEMBERS

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 2 pm**

WABASH COUNTY | Hathaway Preserve at Ross Run

Ross Run in winter is spectacular! 20' icicles, frozen waterfalls and fossils. Depending on the weather, we'll be walking either through frigid water or on ice. Choose appropriate footwear and consider bringing dry shoes and socks for after. Space is limited. **RSVP by January 9.** Presented by preserve steward Kirk Swaidner and the Kissel Family.



## NEW MEMBER OPEN HOUSE

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 1-2:30 pm**

ALLEN COUNTY | ACRES Land Trust Office

Are you new to ACRES? This open house event allows you to meet other members and learn how your support helps protect local land. Come when you can, leave when you must. Refreshments provided.



## FAMILY ART WORKSHOP

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 10 am**

ALLEN COUNTY | ACRES Land Trust Office

At this art workshop, designed for children ages 6-11 years old, participants will create a winter-inspired piece with ACRES volunteer Erin McKeever. All supplies provided. Join for a winter scavenger hunt hike afterwards. Space is limited. **RSVP by January 23.** Registration is required for all attendees: children, parents and caregivers.

## NATURE JOURNAL WORKSHOP FOR ACRES MEMBERS

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2-3:30 pm**

ALLEN COUNTY | ACRES Land Trust Office

Spend a winter afternoon getting creative! A nature journal combines art and writing to record observations and thoughts about nature. Learn journaling tips and techniques with ACRES volunteer Bridgette Hernandez. No prior experience is necessary. All supplies are provided. Space is limited. **RSVP by January 30.**

## WORLD WETLANDS DAY HIKE

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 11 am - 12:30 pm**

NOBLE COUNTY | Lloyd W. Bender Memorial Forest

Celebrate World Wetlands Day on the trails with ACRES Stewardship crew. Walk through a variety of wetland habitats and learn about these unique systems. Space is limited. **RSVP by January 31.**



## SWIFT HIKE & BALD EAGLE WATCH

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1-5 pm**

WABASH & MIAMI COUNTIES | Begins at Hanging Rock National Natural Landmark

Caravan along with us to several ACRES preserves in Wabash County. Take a quick hike at each preserve to watch for bald eagles soaring along the ravines and waterways. End the journey in Miami County, with a stop at Seven Pillars Nature Preserve. Space is limited. **RSVP by February 20.**

## BOOTS & BREWS

**3RD SATURDAY OF THE MONTH**

Boots & Brews is an ACRES Land Trust hiking group for nature-loving young adults in their 20's and 30's. Come solo or bring a friend, hike and stay for a brew or two afterwards! See [acreslandtrust.org/series/boots-brews](https://www.acreslandtrust.org/series/boots-brews)

## PARTNERSHIP EVENTS

### GRIEF HIKES WITH STILLWATER HOSPICE

**3RD FRIDAY OF THE MONTH, 10 am**

Starting in January, Stillwater Hospice is partnering with ACRES for another year of Grief Hikes. Join a group hike to process grief in nature. Call **260-435-3261**, email [GriefCenter@stillwater-hospice.org](mailto:GriefCenter@stillwater-hospice.org), visit [stillwater-hospice.org/complementary-grief-programs](https://www.stillwater-hospice.org/complementary-grief-programs), or scan the **QR code** to register for a hike.



## SAVE THE DATE

### FORT WAYNE HOME AND GARDEN SHOW

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27 - SUNDAY, MARCH 2**

ALLEN COUNTY | Allen County War Memorial Coliseum  
4000 Parnell Ave, Fort Wayne, IN 46805

Visit the ACRES booth at the Home and Garden Show! Learn more about ACRES mission, renew your membership and purchase gear. For more information, visit [home-gardenshow.com](https://www.home-gardenshow.com).

### ASHERWOOD MAPLE SYRUP EVENT FOR ACRES MEMBERS

**SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 9 am-NOON**

WABASH COUNTY | Asherwood Environmental Center

Join ACRES for a guided tour of the maple sugaring operation and a chance to enjoy some of the sweet stuff for yourself. Volunteers needed. To help, contact Jason Kissel at [jkissel@acreslandtrust.org](mailto:jkissel@acreslandtrust.org) or **260-637-2273, ext. 102.**

# PLANNING FOR ACRES FUTURE



by Dawn Ritchie, Outgoing Board President



Scan to view Strategic Plan

Periodically, any organization should carefully assess its mission, vision, goals and objectives to ensure it stays focused on the values it holds dear. Strategic planning is crucial to ensure that everyone associated with the organization is working towards the same vision.

ACRES embarked on a new strategic planning process in December 2022 with the guidance of Colin Maiorano of StrategyWorx. ACRES Board of Directors spent six months researching, analyzing and discussing various topics such as land ethic, preservation and conservation. Through this process, and with the help of surveys, we gleaned key insights from our board members, using our collective wisdom and experience to build a strategy.

We met in an all-day retreat to build consensus on priorities. In the retreat and in our board meetings, we reviewed past strategic plans and our mission and vision. We looked at the organization's history, and we looked into the future. Our board examined organizational challenges, strengths and weaknesses. We spent valuable time on an opportunity analysis and a financial analysis. Finally, we worked with Mr. Maiorano to develop an execution strategy. Through more than a year of strategic planning, Executive Director Jason Kissel and staff engaged in our efforts to create an effective strategic plan that will carry ACRES forward into the future.

I'm pleased to report that we adopted the 2024–2026 Strategic Plan in our August Board Meeting. I invite all ACRES members and stakeholders to examine our Mission, Values, Goals and our four Strategic Initiatives:

- *Launch an entrepreneurial venture*
- *Implement a major gifts program*
- *Implement a corporate partnership program*
- *Acquire statewide collaborative grants*

We will use our expertise, assets and experience to work with partners to generate consulting revenue. We will build awareness about major gifts, identify donor prospects and connect donor passions with our mission. We will pursue corporate partnerships to complete large-scale projects and increase capacity. We will work with other conservation organizations to collectively secure grants that will change the landscape of land protection here in our region.

I hope you are encouraged by these new initiatives. I know our Board of Directors and staff are eager to add these initiatives to the many great things we work on daily to make ACRES Land Trust an organization our members, donors and all stakeholders will continue to cherish. As we execute this new strategic plan, we will continue to celebrate ACRES many successes and look forward with excitement to our efforts to protect land and habitat forever!

# Asherwood Regional Stewardship Hub

ACRES service area contains some of the most unique plant communities in Indiana. ACRES protects properties across a 27-county area in northeast Indiana, northwest Ohio and southern Michigan. Being spread across such a large area has many benefits. Plant communities do not respect state lines, so it is nice to know that we can work across artificial boundaries. We are fortunate to work within an area with so much diversity among plant communities. However, our extensive service area presents some logistical challenges.



In our never-ending pursuit of increased efficiency, our stewardship crew divided the service area into eastern and western regions, beginning in September. On our Asherwood preserve in Wabash County, we have a new satellite office which already had the needed infrastructure to serve as a base of operations. The existing office space in the Environmental Center will once again be fully utilized by the stewardship crew based there.

Currently, all fieldwork is coordinated and dispatched from our main office in Huntertown. This results in an hour and a half drive to our southern and westernmost properties. Having two stewardship crews spread evenly across the service area will result in more consistent monitoring of our furthest preserves. This new initiative will result in much quicker response to new and expanding populations of invasive species. This will also allow ACRES staff to spend more time on each property becoming better acquainted with those properties within their respective regions.

Stewardship Regional Managers oversee stewardship within these regions, and full-time Land Stewards will assist them in carrying out tasks. ACRES recently hired a new Land Steward based out of the Asherwood satellite office. Learn more about Taylere McCoy on page 19.





## Contractual Services

ACRES receives dozens of calls each year from folks requesting stewardship services. The waitlist can be lengthy, with only a few local companies offering services such as tree plantings, prescribed burns, forestry mulching and general invasive species control.

Following our strategic planning process, a new venture, an innovative way to grow our stewardship team, began taking shape. We devised a plan to grow stewardship capacity and general awareness while cultivating future land donors. The main idea is to offer selective stewardship services to partner organizations, and, perhaps in time, the general public. The services offered will result in enough revenue to hire additional stewardship personnel. Under our current model, revenue goals are obtainable within six months, allowing the new staff member(s) to cover their own yearly wages and spend half of their time working on ACRES-owned properties.

For the first year or so, ACRES will offer limited services to partner organizations, allowing us to “get our feet wet” with those whom we have been closely working with for years. Over time, we will consider offering additional services to the general public. With limited capacity and 8,000 acres of our own to steward, we will carefully consider each potential project. Emphasis will be placed on projects adjacent to and near existing ACRES preserves and those within our conservation priority areas.

By selecting projects carefully, we can ensure that habitat quality is being enhanced where it matters most. Additionally, offering these services will provide ACRES with more opportunities to meet with landowners who care about the quality of their land, folks we would like to see join as members and become future land donors or sellers.

## Raising Our Standards: Recap



Seven Pillars Nature Preserve parking lot after being updated.

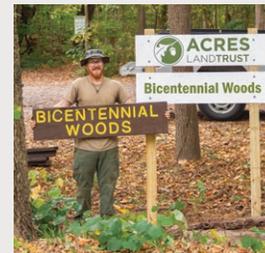
Imagine driving down a country road on a sunny Saturday morning, hoping to glimpse for the first time one of Miami County’s hidden gems, the Seven Pillars of the Mississinewa Landmark. You navigate the picturesque countryside, your GPS guiding you on your adventure, and begin searching for the approaching trailhead parking lot. As you slow down, you spot a muddy, pothole-filled pull-off that could easily be mistaken for an off-road access lane instead of a parking lot. There are no clear indications of whether or not you’re even in the right place.



Before

This scenario was too real for some of ACRES open preserves five years ago. From mismatched entrance signs across different preserves to ill-sized (or entirely missing) parking lots, the visitor experience varied widely at these remarkable places. Using visitor feedback, we began to craft a set of standards we would implement at each of our open preserves until every place got the love it deserved.

When you visit the Seven Pillars of the Mississinewa Landmark today, you’ll notice a vast array of improvements in the years since the scenario described above. The parking lot was moved down the road to a more visible location, and gravel now helps prevent some of the past’s muddier situations. Updated road signs reassure visitors they are indeed on an ACRES Nature Preserve, and new trailhead signs spell out the expectations of folks visiting these special places.



Throughout this initiative, parking lots in popular locations like Kokiwanee and Bicentennial Woods were responsibly expanded to accommodate a few more vehicles. While these lots can still reach capacity during peak times, we’re now maximizing the space available at these locations.

Other locations, like the Heinzerling Family Five Points Nature Preserve, finally have an actual parking lot. Visitors no longer need to pull off along the side of a country road to enjoy this preserve’s trail system.

Closed preserves also received new signs, complete with preserve name and a “No Trespassing” indicator. This minor change has helped folks visually grasp the volume of land that ACRES has safeguarded throughout its 64 years of existence.

These adjustments, coupled with a heightened dedication to maintaining trails, and enhancing access to trail maps through online availability, have collectively elevated the quality of experiences on ACRES properties. And it doesn’t stop there—in the future, every open preserve will receive the same treatment. Exploring ACRES preserves is now an experience of ease, clarity and a deeper connection to the landscapes we’ve worked hard to protect.

As we look ahead, ACRES continued enhancements ensure that every journey into nature feels welcoming, safe and memorable for all who visit.



Taylere McCoy,  
ACRES Land Steward

**Welcome, Taylere!**

Taylere McCoy is the latest addition to the ACRES team! She joins us as a Land Steward who will work out of the newly established Asherwood satellite office alongside Regional Stewardship Manager Gavin King.

Growing up in southwest Ohio, she spent her younger years outdoors hiking, biking and kayaking the Little Miami River. She was always excited about wildlife on her adventures, especially when visiting the Hueston Woods Nature Center where injured animals are rehabilitated.

Taylere's passion for wildlife grew after she took a high school zoology class which solidified her desire to work with animals. Initially enrolling in Ohio State University's

Zoology program, she soon shifted to Forestry and Wildlife Management. "I realized that I was most passionate about protecting habitats," Taylere explains.

Today, Taylere thrives on identifying new species and understanding the complex ecosystems around her. "I get great joy being able to find and recognize plants and animals, especially when I can make connections about their importance to the ecosystem," Taylere explains. And her joy spills out as she interacts with others, explaining the importance of natural spaces and their impact on everything around us.

Outside of work, Taylere supports various causes close to her heart: she's always looking for ways to give back, from childhood cancer research to animal rescue. "My husband and I adopted our senior dog from our local animal shelter," she shares. Taylere has been transforming her own backyard lawn into a certified wildlife habitat, replacing grass with native wildflowers and other wild plants to support local ecosystems while educating and encouraging neighbors to do the same.

"Land stewardship reminds us that we are connected to a world much larger than ourselves," Taylere says. "It is our responsibility to restore what we can, not only for future generations of humans, but also because other species have just as much right to live and thrive as we do."



**Youth Environmental Club of Northeast Indiana**

Student lead organization to engage environmentally minded youth across the region in collaboration with local partners like ACRES Land Trust.



**Learn More**

Anthris Career Academy, presentation  
Arc of Wabash, presentation

Auburn Rotary Club, presentation

General Dynamics Mission Systems,  
corporate workday

Denise Henke, donating trash bags

Huntington Optimist Club, presentation

Jeri Kornegay & Lyn Winchell, donating  
paper towels and event snacks

LaGrange County Retired Teachers,  
presentation

Libertarian Party of Indiana District 3,  
volunteer workday, removing invasive bush  
at Bicentennial Woods

Jeff & Michele Michel, donating a case of  
copy paper

Rune Restaurant, benefit dinner

Isaac & Kelsey Saxton, hosting Mackel Nature  
Preserve open house

Donna Seiler, donating coffee, event snacks  
and compostable plates

Kirk Swaidner, new mower tires; aiding with  
the Summer Creek Stomp for members

ACRES Board of Directors and Committee  
Members

Archive project volunteers: Chris Fairfield,  
Mary Anna Feitler, Carol Spallone, Jannice  
Hubbard, Julie Samek, John Shire

Dr. Scott Bergeson and crew from Purdue  
University Fort Wayne, hosting a bat  
research demonstration for members

Nancy & Joe Conrad, aiding in grief hike  
partnership hike

John Laatsch, hosting a field flower hike for  
members

Erin McKeever, activity station at Kids Play  
Day event

Mackel Open House volunteers, Kris  
Connerly, Hometown Historical Society,  
Cathy Lassen,

Mark Maffey, sharing ACRES mission at Open  
Streets festival

Monarch Festival booth volunteers, Steve  
Etheridge, Apollo Ramos

Office garden Volunteers, Stephanie Bailey,  
Kris Connerly, Nancy Conrad, Diane Jones,  
Natasha Manor & Patrick Ewing

Office support volunteers

Quarterly assembly and distribution  
volunteers

AJ Rambo, leading Boots & Brews Hikes

Seed Collection Workday Volunteers

Al Spice, sharing ACRES mission at  
Middlebury Riverfest

Summer Barn Concert Series Volunteers,  
Dave Brumm & Kim McDonald, Kris  
Connerly, Nancy & Joe Conrad

Volunteer preserve stewards, caretakers and  
trail monitors

Dirt Wain, donating compost service for the  
Volunteer Appreciation Lunch

Walks & Wine hike leaders, Chris Fairfield,  
Steve Etheridge

Julie Wall, hosting a bookbinding workshop

**wish list**

Your generous donations of these supplies help keep our  
overhead costs down to focus on our mission. Thank you!

[acreslandtrust.org/wishlist](https://acreslandtrust.org/wishlist)



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**ACRES Land Trust**  
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## CARDINAL CONVERSATION

Walk in snowy woods

Cardinal pays no attention

We enjoy silence

Painting & Haiku by  
Randy Roberts



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