

THE ACRES  
**QUARTERLY**

Spring 2025 | Vol. 64 - No. 1



**ACRES**  
LANDTRUST

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- *Youth Taking Environmental Action Now*
- *Connecting Young Adults with Nature and Community*
- *How Nature-Based Learning Fuels Curiosity in Kids*

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# WELCOME 81newmembers!

## From the Executive Director

Dear Members,

This year, we celebrate ACRES 65th anniversary. Our founders celebrated the fifth anniversary, and some of them the 50th anniversary, but we celebrate the 65th.

Others will celebrate the 100th and 500th anniversaries. Each year ACRES is a new organization. New people join, new land is preserved, new life occurs on existing preserves, new crops are planted and new ideas put into motion.

Yet we are also rooted in history. The past isn't left behind—it's carried forward. Each acre of previously preserved land is protected and allowed to thrive again each year. Young trees sprout and grow under old trees.

Nature is never the same twice—it's always dynamic. Ancient natural cycles require the nimbleness and energy of youth. The same is true for ACRES. As the organization matures, we rely on youth to continue the system.

As ACRES mimics the natural systems we protect, it's imperative that people of all ages are actively involved. Those who have been members for decades provide the framework for the day-one member to thrive. This issue highlights some of the younger ACRES supporters.

The system requires all of us—from Sam Schwartz who joined in May 1960 and has been a member since, to those listed on the opposite page who just joined this past quarter and everyone else in between. Thank you for playing your role in this ever-new yet ever-maturing organization.

Thanks,



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

Cover: A close-up of native Blue-eyed Marys flowering at the Evelyn and Wendell Dygert Nature Preserve, where these beloved spring wildflowers find sanctuary among the preserved natural landscape

Michael & Holly Allison  
Adele Arnold  
TJ & Kristine Baatz  
Marci Ball  
Carl & Nicole Bartling  
from Linnea Bartling  
Marcia Bates  
from John Niemeyer  
Kim & Shannon Beard  
Maureen & Eric Beck  
Kalli Bednarz  
from Christopher Lamberson  
Lisa & Ronald Bernett  
Rick Bonar  
from Max Anderson & Georgia McCart  
Tom Boyer  
Phyllis Brockmyer  
Bridget & Chuck Bussard  
Porter Craighead  
Nicolas Crump  
Joseph Davis & Brenda Spears  
Douglas & Theresa Deter  
Kayla & Micah Dyson  
Vicki Eber  
Dennis & Gale Eller  
Dale Estabrook  
from Kim Beard  
William & Linda Etzler  
Brooks Fetters  
Jackie & Ed Gibson  
Emily Guerrero

Evan Hall  
David Hammer  
Joshua Heckelsmiller  
Glenn Hile  
David Kattau  
Craig & Cheryl Klinker  
Jeff & Mary Kramer  
Christopher Lamberson  
Larry, Laura & Allison Libbe  
Lauren Linnick  
Mary Lutz  
Andrew & Courtney Lykens  
Sia M'Bayo  
Mason Macknick & Kayli Wade  
Tracy Marshall Johnson & Richard Johnson  
Leitia & Ben McHugh  
Aden Metzger  
John & Shalee Myron  
Linda & Jim Newell  
John & Melissa O'Connor  
Rachel Pace  
Christopher Pease  
Henry Pflueger & Abigail Kucharski  
from Jordan Hartleroad  
Thomas & Sara Philippsen  
Kevin Purdy  
Dave Reynolds  
Hugo Robles Madrigal  
Sally Routh  
Katherine Rowan & Robert Baker

Rune Restaurant  
RWE  
Jenny Sanders  
Jen Scherer  
Nancy Schoenle  
Amy Schreiber  
Jubal Simmons  
from Cristina Ochoa  
Craig Singleton & Suzana Bacon  
Mike Sleighter  
from Michelle Jennings  
Taylor Sorg  
David & Lindsay Stafford  
Chandra Stempf  
from Maureen Beck  
Treva Strasen  
Maricela Stroud  
Terry Stumpf  
Shannon & Timothy Tappan  
Pamela & Kevin Taylor  
Kevin Thull  
James & Lori Todd  
Anita Twitchell-Hanna & Patrick Hanna  
Joseph Ulrey  
from Christopher Lamberson  
Dona & Valentin Uncheselu  
Wabash County Historical Society  
Linda & John Walls  
Tom Zeller

## In Honor of

Marisol Nunez  
from Cristina Ochoa  
Angie O'Neill  
from Debora Meek

Dwight Fish & Oxana Werbiansky  
from Karen Griggs  
Tammy Zonker  
from Amy Eisenstein

## In Memory of

Daniel Bacone  
from John & Joyce Bacone  
Brian Becker  
from Mark & Denise Timmis, Patricia Timmis  
Beverly Cowan  
from Deborah Willig  
Marilyn Gruesbeck  
from Steve & Robin Aldred, Joe & Judith Heiney, Mark & Jane Walls & Betty Gatchell, Mike Hasty, Allen & Diane Tietz, Susan Barna, David & Elizabeth Meyers, Julie & Richard Samek, MINDCAP Center

Micah McKeirman  
from Veronica Hulbert  
Lloyd King  
from Barrett McNagny LLP, Carolyn Bobay, Ken & Kay Folks, Timothy & Elaine Gaylord, Lucy Hess, Marilyn & Tony Johnston, Nancy Kilduski, Lamont King, David Lengel, Jason & Tina Linker, Wendy Malwitz, Midwest America Federal Credit Union, Conrad Satala, Linda & Larry Wardlaw, Clayton & Lori Wilson

Continued on page 18



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 8,300 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



## PLANTING TOMORROW

# Young Voices in Conservation

For 65 years, ACRES Land Trust has protected natural areas in northeast Indiana and portions of Ohio and Michigan. Our future depends on engaging every generation in conservation, and today's youth are answering the call.

From high school students creating environmental clubs to young professionals fostering community through hiking groups, the next generation is finding innovative ways to connect with and protect nature. Even our youngest land stewards, preschoolers exploring preserved properties, are developing the empathy and understanding that will shape tomorrow's conservation efforts.

These four stories showcase how different age groups are engaging with conservation in our region. They remind us that whether you're 3, 33 or 93, there's a place for you in the ACRES community and the broader movement to protect our natural areas—today, tomorrow and forever.

## PLANTING TOMORROW



### *Youth Environmental Club of Northeast Indiana*



by Trent George

As a senior at Homestead High School, I noticed a gap in environmental engagement opportunities for students. This led me to establish the **Youth Environmental Club of Northeast Indiana (YECNI)**. This student-created and student-led organization provides opportunities for high school students to engage with environmentalism and conservation.

The club holds monthly meetings that alternate between guest speakers from environmental careers and hands-on service projects that allow students to get outdoors and make an environmental difference in their community. This format helps students stay engaged by continuously having new experiences and encountering new things. The monthly schedule also allows students to participate actively without feeling overwhelmed by their involvement.



One of the coolest parts about YECNI is its partnerships with local organizations. These collaborations provide diverse opportunities for students, including service projects, meeting spaces and access to field experts. We continue to seek partnerships with various organizations to expand the range of experiences available to our members.

We recognized early on that lack of environmental education was a significant barrier to action in our community. Educating students about environmental issues empowers them to share this knowledge within their communities, creating a ripple effect of environmental awareness and advocacy.

Looking ahead, YECNI's success will be measured primarily through student involvement and growth. Our immediate goals focus on establishing consistency in student participation and our monthly events schedule. Ensuring these two things will give YECNI permanence and a foundation for future years.

Beyond increased student engagement, we're working to strengthen our relationships with local environmental organizations. By integrating YECNI more deeply into Northeast Indiana's environmental advocacy network, we aim to establish ourselves as a permanent fixture in the region's environmental education landscape. Through these partnerships and our continued focus on student education and engagement, YECNI strives to make a lasting impact on environmental advocacy in our community.



## FROM PADAWANS TO PROTECTORS *Youth Taking Environmental Action Now*

by Antonio Uncheselu



ACRES Land Trust high school intern Antonio shares his perspective on youth involvement in environmental conservation. In this essay, he challenges the common belief that young people must wait until they're older to make meaningful contributions to preservation efforts, drawing from his experiences as both a student and ACRES intern.

If you spend time with us, you'll hear a common expression: "When I'm older," to describe our ambitions and career goals. "When I'm older, I want to improve the policies in place to preserve the environment" is mine. The expression suggests that, similar to the definition of youth, we aren't old enough to do certain things. But often, we don't need to be older. We can start now. Why do I need to wait to make a difference? This question was part of why I wanted to intern at ACRES Land Trust during my senior year of high school. ACRES allows me to begin fulfilling my desire to preserve the environment.

Youth are the future. We will be the ones who face the consequences of today's actions. For this reason, the youth must become more involved in preserving the environment.

We are already seeing the effects of a degrading environment, including warmer summers, less snow and increased hurricanes and tornadoes. Without the help of youth, these will continue to happen and will be exacerbated.



Antonio leads a workshop teaching peers to create seed bombs using local plant seeds.

The good news is that people are beginning to realize this. Classes such as Environmental Science, Ecology, Earth Science, Forestry and more are starting to be implemented in high schools nationwide. These classes are gateways.

Before I took an Environmental Science class, I was aware of climate change and global warming but unaware of how serious the problem is on both local and global levels. The class opened my eyes to current issues and showed me how bleak our future could look if we don't do something.

As more students become familiar with the gravity of environmental problems we are facing, the more youth will become involved, as I did, and the better chance that we can preserve our environment today, tomorrow, and forever. Christian Freitag, the Conservation Law Center's director, wrote that we must be "Jedi with green lightsabers" and fight to preserve our surrounding ecosystems. But, before Jedis can become Jedis, they are first padawans, so we must train padawans with green lightsabers and create a generation aware of pressing environmental issues and one that will continue to fight for the preservation and conservation of our natural lands.

How do we become padawans of conservation? First, most high schools in the region offer a class on environmental science, a great place to become more educated on current and future environmental issues. ACRES Land Trust is another great way. ACRES offers fantastic opportunities: volunteering, conservation presentations and the many trails available. ACRES helps raise awareness and gives people a chance to make a difference. The Youth Environmental Club of Northeast Indiana (YECNI) does service projects and learns from conservation experts. If there's something specific about environmentalism you're passionate about, don't be afraid to be vocal about it! Start a club at your school; I guarantee others share a similar passion.

It's time to face environmental issues together to stop asking, "What do you want to do when you're older," and ask, "How can we take action now?" By empowering young people with knowledge, opportunities, and a platform for their voices, we can ignite a movement that prioritizes environmental stewardship. Together, we can inspire a new generation of leaders committed to creating a sustainable future.

## PLANTING TOMORROW



### **BOOTS & BREWS:** *Connecting Young Adults with Nature and Community*

As ACRES works to bring awareness to land protection, one of the questions is: “How do we engage young adults?”

ACRES member AJ Rambo recognized the need for community and the growing gap between people and nature. AJ came to ACRES with a unique proposal: a hiking club focused on young adults in their 20s and 30s. The goal: to create a space for young adults to engage with each other and nature. AJ committed to leading this monthly event, and in spring 2023, ACRES “Boots & Brews” club officially launched.

The club has two parts. First, participants hike an ACRES trail. Afterward, they join a treat-yourself stop at a local brewery or other food/drink establishment. Visiting local restaurants can be a great way to engage with the community and support ACRES neighbors.

“Going to a brewery might seem contradictory to a healthy hike, but health is more than what we consume physically. ‘Brews’ is about sharing a table with friends, telling stories, playing games and bonding over a meal. It’s just a catchy placeholder to imply that we are going to some sort of restaurant afterward. No drinking is required,” AJ says.

After over a year of leading the club, AJ and ACRES have observed exciting results. A slew of regular attendees have begun to form a community. Some participants have joined as ACRES members or attended other ACRES events. Though AJ enjoys the hikes, he hopes that in the future the group will be interested in volunteer events—like litter cleanups and invasive plant removal workdays.

“I believe you first need to appreciate something before having the desire to care for it. On these hikes, I want to introduce the idea that we must preserve these places so they can remain healthy and flourish forever.”

ACRES greatly appreciates the passion and commitment AJ has brought to Boots & Brews. In turn, AJ has found a way to create community, and to find an answer to the “what can I do?” question many young adults have.

Thank you AJ for lending your time, talents and passion to Boots & Brews! Interested in attending the club? Learn more at [acreslandtrust.org/bootsandbrews](https://acreslandtrust.org/bootsandbrews).



## PLANTING TOMORROW



### **RAISING EXPLORERS:** *How Nature-Based Learning Fuels Curiosity in Kids*

Thinking back to your childhood, can you remember a specific location you frequented that inspired your love for the natural world? Maybe climbing your favorite tree, playing with siblings in your family’s woods, or walking your dog through your neighborhood park?



Providing kids with opportunities to explore natural areas is vital in shaping a more environmentally conscious and empathetic-to-nature generation. ACRES has partnered with The Montessori School at WPC in Wabash County and Christina Wilson from Pop-Up Playschool in Allen County, both offer nature-based early childhood education.

The Montessori School’s Forest School uses ACRES Asherwood as its home base. There, kids as young as 3 years hike the trails, learn basic plant identification, identify bird calls and much more! Aside from the obvious outdoor skills, Forest School prides itself on building confidence and the “coordination and self-assuredness that come with climbing and hiking outdoors.”

Christina Wilson, founder of Pop-Up Playschool, focuses on a nature-centered theme each day. The students, who Christina refers to as Explorers, learn about the science of the natural world on their daily walks and even during snack time. She strives for Explorers to learn about safety in nature and how to dress appropriately for the weather. Parents rave that their kids can’t wait to go back to school for more adventures!

Although both institutions want kids to walk away with knowledge of nature, treating the natural world with kindness is the ultimate goal. Christina said: “I believe that teaching these concepts early—how to admire a flower without picking it, how to leave animals in their natural habitats, how to interact with people and the environment in a gentler way—will have a ripple effect as they grow up, and they may become people who care about conservation.”

Photo spread on pages 10 –11 by Thomas Sprunger: Marsh marigolds bring color to wetter portions of Kokiwanee in the spring. Despite their name, these shining wetland flowers are actually members of the buttercup family—their large, waxy petals evolved to attract the earliest emerging pollinators of spring.



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

## ASHERWOOD MAPLE SYRUP EVENT FOR ACRES MEMBERS

**SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 9-11am**  
WABASH COUNTY | Asherwood

Experience a maple syrup adventure! Enjoy fresh pancakes while exploring our maple sugaring operation with expert guides. Sample and purchase ACRES syrup straight from the source. \$5/person, under 5 free. *Presented by Asherwood caretaker Grady Stout, ACRES Executive Director Jason Kissel and ACRES volunteers.*



## SPRING CLEANING CARAVANS

Help beautify our preserves during spring cleaning! All supplies and snacks provided. **RSVP appreciated.**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 5-7:30 pm**  
HUNTINGTON COUNTY | Pehkokia Woods

Join a cleaning caravan to our two Huntington County preserves. Meet at Pehkokia Woods and finish at Tel-Hy.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 2-5 pm**  
WABASH COUNTY | Hanging Rock National Natural Landmark

Join a cleaning caravan to two of our Wabash County preserves. Meet at Hanging Rock National Natural Landmark and finish at Kokiwanee.



## ART WORKSHOP FOR ACRES MEMBERS

**THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 6-8pm**  
ALLEN COUNTY | ACRES Land Trust Office

Get creative with local artist Julie Wall, owner of The HEDGE art and custom print shop. Learn how to make "nature-y" needlepoint art. Each participant can create several needlepoint art pieces to take home. No experience necessary, all supplies provided. Space is limited. **RSVP by March 18.**

## TIMBERDOODLE TOODLE TREK

**SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 6:45-8 am**  
ALLEN COUNTY | ACRES Land Trust Office

Attempt to discover the elusive woodcock's dawn courtship dance! Start with light refreshments and a brief presentation, then hike field trails to try and witness these unique ground birds and their distinctive calls. Led by Evan Hill, Stewardship Director. Space is limited. **RSVP by March 20.**



## BOOK DISCUSSION FOR ACRES MEMBERS

**SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 2-3:30 pm**  
ALLEN COUNTY | ACRES Land Trust Office

Discuss *The North Woods* by Daniel Mason at this spring book club gathering. Hosted by volunteers Natasha Manor and Bridgett Hernandez. Space is limited. **RSVP by March 27.**

## ASHERWOOD CELEBRATION

**SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 1-4 pm**  
WABASH COUNTY | Asherwood

Discover the 160-acre Asherwood preserve, which transitioned from Marion Schools to ACRES stewardship in 2024. Explore stations featuring the land's geology and maple syrup heritage at this open house event.

## FAMILY WILDFLOWER SCAVENGER HUNT HIKE

**SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 2-3 pm**  
DEKALB COUNTY | Heinzerling Family Five Points Nature Preserve

Spot spring wildflowers on this family-friendly woodland walk! Track your discoveries with the provided scavenger hunt sheet. Snacks provided! Space is limited. **RSVP by April 12.**

## WILDFLOWER HIKES FOR ACRES MEMBERS

Spot spectacular spring wildflowers with local wildflower enthusiasts. Learn about the unique blooms transforming our forest floor.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 2-3:30 pm**

WHITLEY COUNTY | Evelyn and Wendell Dygert Nature Preserve  
Hosted by volunteers Dave Hicks and Deborah Hustin. Space is limited.  
**RSVP by April 18.**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 5:30-7 pm**

WHITLEY COUNTY | Evelyn and Wendell Dygert Nature Preserve  
Hosted by ACRES Stewardship Manager Jenna Bair. Space is limited. **RSVP by April 22.**

**FRIDAY, MAY 16, 5:30-7 pm**

NOBLE COUNTY | Lloyd W. Bender Memorial Forest  
Learn about both the geology and spring wildflowers on this hike with local geology expert Tony Fleming. Space is limited. **RSVP by May 14.**

## INVASIVE WEED REMOVAL WORKDAYS

This is a great time of year to remove the easy-to-pull invasive weeds. Gloves, bags and light snacks provided. **RSVP appreciated.**

**Garlic Mustard Pulls (Allen County)**

**TUESDAY, MAY 13, 4-6 pm** Spring Lake Woods and Bog

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 9-11 am** Bicentennial Woods

**SATURDAY, MAY 17, 10 am-noon** McNabb-Walter Nature Preserve

**Dames Rocket Pulls (DeKalb County)**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 21, 4-6 pm** James P. Covell Nature Preserve

**SATURDAY, MAY 10, 9-11 am** James P. Covell Nature Preserve



## POETRY WORKSHOP FOR ACRES MEMBERS

**SATURDAY, MAY 10, 2-4 pm**  
ALLEN COUNTY | ACRES Office

Get creative with local poet Erica Anderson-Senter, author of *Midwestern Poet's Incomplete Guide to Symbolism*. Learn simple poetry techniques, chat with fellow members and craft your own rhythmical composition. Open to all experience levels. Supplies provided. Space is limited. **RSVP by May 8.**

## COME JOIN US

### EARTH DAY EVENTS, APRIL 20-22!

Celebrate with us! Find times and locations at [acreslandtrust.org/earthday](https://acreslandtrust.org/earthday)



## BOOTS & BREWS

**3RD SATURDAY OF THE MONTH**

Boots & Brews is an ACRES Land Trust hiking group for nature-loving young adults in their 20s and 30s. Come solo or bring a friend, hike and stay for a brew or two afterwards! See [acreslandtrust.org/series/boots-brews](https://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://stillwater-hospice.org/complementary-grief-programs), or scan the QR code to register for a hike.



# ACRES YEAR IN REVIEW

Looking Back at ACRES in 2024



## ACQUISITION

### Shingle Oak Ridge

by Ben Taylor

Some might say that the importance of land conservation came to them during a class, or they learned about it from a friend or realized that they desired to better understand their own property.

However, for the Kern siblings, Shirley Needham, Pat Holmgren and Bill Kern, land conservation was in their blood. The family's passion for conservation began at the dinner table, as their father, Bob Kern, was instrumental in protecting vital tracts of wetlands within the Manitou Wetlands complex on Lake Manitou's southern end. Their family dinners were frequently joined by fellow conservationists like Durward Allen, who was instrumental in studying wolves in Isle Royale National Park.

If that family name sounds familiar, look back no further than 2007, when ACRES acquired Ruth Kern Woodland Preserve from the Kern family, which was named after the siblings' mother. Many have enjoyed the preserve's lovely trails, a wonderful place for wildlife viewing.

Fast forward 17 years and the Kern family is looking to conserve more of their beloved Fulton County land, forever. A generous donation from the Kern family and help with funding from the Next Level Conservation Trust lands ACRES its newest property in Fulton County, the 117-acre Shingle Oak Ridge—a property the family has owned since 1963 and is just upstream from Ruth Kern Woodland Preserve on the Tippecanoe River.



Shingle Oak Ridge is named for one of the oddest members of the Oak family, the Shingle Oak, which occurs naturally in the sandy soils on the property. Shingle Oaks lack the classic lobed leaves of other oak trees; instead, they have leaves akin to those of the black gum tree. This can make them hard to identify until the acorns start forming.

The property falls within one of ACRES newly identified priority areas along the Tippecanoe River, one of the most biodiverse rivers in the Midwest. The property protects oak woodlands, floodplain forest, an emergent wetland and a row crop agricultural field. ACRES intends to plant trees to restore the field to its native habitat. In the future the property will be open to the public after habitat restoration has begun and a trail has been placed.



## STEWARDSHIP



17,000

Trees planted across 27 acres

2024 was a record-breaking year for # of acres covered by stewardship team (invasive management and enhancement)

80+ acres

Enhanced through prescribed fire, mulching and selective thinning of trees

750 acres

Invasive species managed

6

Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species found

## VOLUNTEERISM

1,923



Volunteer hours reported

645 (34%)

Admin (archiving, board/committee, office help)

364 (20%)

Outreach (hikes, booths, events, Quarterly, volunteer work days)

914 (46%)

Stewardship (preserve help, trail monitoring)

\$55,998

Value of hours reported

## PROTECTING MORE LAND

615 acres

Newly protected land

ACRES was able to achieve so much in 2024 thanks to you!



## *Jesse & Agnes Riegsecker Natural Area*

Photo by Jarrid Spicer

On Palm Sunday, April 11, 1965, a tornado struck Jesse and Agnes Riegsecker's homestead outside Middlebury, Indiana. It was one of 10 that moved through the state that day, destroying the family's home and much of the surrounding woodland.

But the Riegseckers' connection to this land—which had come into their possession through an unlikely stroke of fate 14 years earlier—would prove stronger than any storm.



In 1950, a simple rest stop changed the course of the Riegsecker family's life. Jesse and Agnes Riegsecker pulled over to give their children a break from traveling, only to spot a "For Sale" sign in the yard of what would become their future home. The property had an unusual history: initially sold in an estate sale, the courts had deemed the price too low and mandated a second sale. With one uncontested bid of \$13,300, the Riegseckers became the owners of a house and 385 acres outside Middlebury.

"Their friends, instead of thinking they had a great deal, thought they were nuts," recalls their son Joe Riegsecker. "I mean, this was out in the middle of nowhere."

Like most farming families of the era, the Riegseckers immediately set to work. Though the soil wasn't prime farmland, Jesse's determination made it productive. They raised corn and alfalfa alongside cattle and hogs. Through years of persistent labor, they paid off the farm—a testament to Jesse's unwavering work ethic.

In 1958, the family celebrated a milestone: constructing a new house to replace their deteriorating home. "It was a huge event for us kids because the old house really was a disaster," Joe remembers. Seven years later, the Palm Sunday tornado would test their resilience, but the Riegseckers rebuilt, their commitment to this land unshaken.

Decades passed, and Joe eventually returned to the homestead with his wife, caring for the property for 31 years. After Jesse's death in 2008 and Agnes' passing in 2013, Joe began thinking about the land's future. A simple Google search in 2016 led him to ACRES Land Trust, opening years of conversations about preserving his family's legacy and the place they called home.

The property Joe and his brother John entrusted to ACRES offers a variety of habitats. Scattered stands of black oak and their diverse understory offer glimpses of the region's historical landscape. Today, however, most of the property comprises equal parts wetland and early successional fields. Thirty acres of oak/hickory forests persist on the steeper slopes, and a high-quality fen wetland and bog-like system add to the property's ecological significance.

Joe's stewardship set a strong foundation for ACRES conservation work. He devoted countless hours to removing invasive bush honeysuckle from the forestland and planting thousands of trees—a project he counts among his favorites. Blue Heron Ministries has contributed to managing invasive species in the property's high-quality wetland and adjacent uplands.

As ACRES plants 11,000 trees this spring and retires the property's final agricultural field, the land enters a new phase of transformation. Within the next few years, the Jesse and Agnes Riegsecker Natural Area will become ACRES first publicly accessible property in Elkhart County.

What began with a family's chance discovery of a "For Sale" sign has evolved into a lasting legacy of conservation. Under ACRES protection, the Riegseckers' legacy lives on in these wetlands, forests and fields—where 'Protected Forever' has replaced 'For Sale' as nature's final chapter.



Photo by Jarrid Spicer

Welcome, Joanna Stebing!

ACRES Land Trust is delighted to welcome Joanna Stebing to our team! Joanna's journey in conservation began in the border areas between Fort Wayne's neighborhoods and its wilder spaces. As she recalls, "When my dad took me to the zoo, he'd often wait patiently while I spent an hour or longer playing in the creek by the parking lot, looking for crawdads and being fascinated by the riffles that contrasted with still, deep pools." These early experiences in overlooked natural spaces shaped her deep appreciation for all aspects of the natural world, not just the manicured or pristine areas.



Joanna Stebing,  
Conservation Manager

As a conservation professional, Joanna draws inspiration from pioneering botanist Lucy Braun, whose work protecting Eastern Forests and advancing women's role in ecology helped shape the modern conservation movement. Joanna's own growth in the field took off at Little Wabash River Nature Preserve, where she learned the value of spending time getting to know a place deeply through repeated careful observation.



Joanna brings to ACRES a particular passion for wetlands. "Wetlands are my absolutely favorite grouping of habitat types," she enthuses. "A lot of people don't realize that we have carnivorous plants here in northern Indiana!" Her excitement for these unique ecosystems matches her recognition that wetland conservation still has much to teach us about these vital natural spaces.

When not in the field, Joanna is an avid reader—currently exploring books about mosses and lichens—or enjoying a run outdoors. Her approach to conservation is both practical and forward-looking. She understands that protected lands are dynamic spaces that will change over time, especially as species adapt to shifting conditions.

Joanna is excited to join ACRES Land Trust during this period of growth and development. "I believe in being an advocate for ecological understanding in my personal and professional life, and living in a way that breathes fire into the potential EVERYONE has to get excited about the land." We look forward to the energy and fresh perspectives she'll bring to our team as we continue to protect our region's natural spaces.

Welcome to ACRES Land Trust, Joanna!

wish list

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

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



ACRES Board of Directors and Committee Members

Archive project volunteers

Chris Fairfield, Carol Spallone, Jannice Hubbard, Julie Samek, John Shire

Office support volunteers

Quarterly assembly and distribution volunteers

AJ Rambo

leading Boots & Brews Hikes

Volunteer preserve stewards, caretakers and trail monitors

Dawn Ritchie

serving as ACRES President

Tim Brauch

leading an Opt-Outside Hike & First Day Hike

Nancy & Joe Conrad

leading a First Day Hike

Chris Fairfield

presenting during the Indian River 25th Anniversary Presentation

Stewart Family

aiding at a Family Play Day

Bridgett Hernandez & Natasha Manor

leading a Book Discussion for Members

John Laatsch

aiding in Pehkokia Woods improvements

Office support volunteers

Pop-Up Plug Planting volunteers

Popp Open House volunteers

Larry Biggerstaff, Tom Gardner, Louise & Keith Pomeroy

In Memory of (Continued on page 3)

Shun-Shin Lee

from Kim Andrew & Jinling Elliott

Wilson Lutz

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The names of 12 ACRES preserves are hidden in the grid below (some are diagonal). **Can you find them all?**

F	O	G	W	E	L	L	F	O	R	E	S	T	H
K	S	K	O	U	R	P	X	T	V	R	W	S	A
F	R	P	N	V	N	M	I	H	G	U	I	E	N
N	A	K	R	W	E	X	Q	A	G	T	N	V	G
W	D	W	O	I	G	V	M	T	G	H	G	E	I
T	I	A	N	S	N	Y	U	H	Y	K	H	N	N
D	U	L	Y	R	A	G	I	A	Q	E	A	P	G
T	R	G	D	T	I	S	L	W	C	R	V	I	R
E	H	V	S	W	A	V	R	A	R	N	E	L	O
L	Q	W	S	S	O	E	E	Y	K	C	N	L	C
H	P	X	U	R	I	O	F	R	H	E	T	A	K
Y	Q	P	Q	E	K	T	D	C	V	A	O	R	X
L	F	O	X	F	I	R	E	W	O	O	D	S	S
H	W	P	R	I	L	O	N	I	D	A	W	C	L

Fawn River  
 Fogwell Forest  
 Fox Fire Woods  
 Hanging Rock  
 Hathaway  
 Lonidaw

Ruth Kern  
 Seven Pillars  
 Spring Lake  
 Tel-Hy  
 Wildwood  
 Wing Haven



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