

FALL 2026

the Quarterly



ACRES
LANDTRUST

Protecting Land. Forever.



From the Executive Director

Dear Members,

When I became ACRES executive director in 2006, my kids were small (3 and under 1). Over the last 20 years, I've had the privilege of watching my children and ACRES mature. Just like my kids, ACRES has grown, thrived and become independent. As a parent and a leader, the ultimate goal is the same: to guide them to a place where they can succeed on their own. My children and ACRES have reached that milestone together.

Now, I get to enjoy the rewards of that effort. My heavy lifting is done. From here on out, my role is to encourage, offer advice when asked and watch the next chapters unfold with pure pride.

I am incredibly grateful for everything ACRES has given me. It has let me live out my five-year-old self's goal of caring for trees, let me work with amazing people and let me toil at meaningful and lasting work.

I'm so proud of what we've built over the past two decades. That pride belongs to all of us. Just as I'm so proud of the adults my children have become—due primarily to their efforts, I'm also very proud of what ACRES has become—due primarily to your efforts.

ACRES is strong, stable and trustworthy—but also dynamic, relevant and exciting. It is uniquely ready to carry our shared goals, land and resources into forever. I can't wait to see how our next executive director takes us even further.

This isn't farewell. I am simply coming beside you as a fellow member, cheering on and supporting our ACRES.

See you on the trails and at events,

Life Member

In this issue, we wish executive director **Jason Kissel** a fond farewell. Read about his impact at ACRES over the last two decades on page 4.

ON THE COVER

Beads of water gather on a blade of grass. As we continue our Year of Water, join us for a “**Recharging Our Wetlands**” fall hike to find out how forests and wetlands filter water and replenish underground water supplies. Learn more on page 13. Photo by Ben Wheeler.

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 8,700 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!

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acreslandtrust.org



WELCOME

40 new members!



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**the
Quarterly**

Bridgett Hernandez, Editor

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A 20-Year Legacy of *Protecting Land. Forever.*

Past and present ACRES board presidents reflect on
Jason Kissel's two decades of leadership

Jason Kissel's gaze is always fixed on forever — *on the infinite*. When he thinks about the land ACRES protects, his time horizon stretches backward across eons of geologic time and forward into eternity. He has faith that the people of ACRES — current and past staff, volunteers, stewards, landowners and donors — are all vitally important. Yet he also recognizes that their collective efforts are only a small part of the infinite created world.

Hathaway Preserve at Ross Run opening ceremony in 2007.





LaSalle Family Natural Area dedication hike in 2026.



David Van Gilder
Former Board President

It was a revelation to me, as board president in 2006, and to the search committee, to hear Jason capture the “forever” vision of ACRES during his interview. As we have learned, Jason is always prepared; he had read deeply about ACRES from its inception in 1960 to its slow growth as a mostly volunteer effort in 2006, and he had visited 18 preserves in

advance of that interview. I recall that, even then, he had a vision of what ACRES could become and that it would endure long after we are gone from this Earth.

After 20 years of guiding ACRES Land Trust through growth, change and enduring commitment to its mission, Jason stepped down as executive director on July 31. For ACRES members, volunteers, landowners, partners, board members and staff, this transition is an opportunity to express deep gratitude for a leader whose work has strengthened not only an organization but an entire conservation community.

We are fortunate to have hired Jason as executive director of ACRES in 2006. At that time, ACRES was already rooted in a powerful promise: to protect natural lands forever. ACRES had a strong working board, the first paid executive director, Carolyn McNagny and 2.5 other staff members. Over the next two decades, Jason ushered in a new era for the promise of “forever” preservation. Under his leadership, ACRES grew from a small circle of conservation advocates into a broad, member-supported organization serving 27 counties across northeast Indiana, southern Michigan and northwest Ohio. The acreage protected by ACRES

more than doubled, reaching more than 8,700 acres. Membership grew to more than 2,200 people, and the organization strengthened its long-term financial foundation through endowment growth and other commitments designed to support the perpetual care of protected land. The staff is now 13, and most of their work is dedicated to perpetuating the founders’ long-term vision.

Those numbers tell an important story, but they do not tell the whole story. Jason’s legacy can also be found in the quiet, patient work that makes land protection possible: conversations with families considering the future of beloved properties, walks through woods and wetlands with landowners, careful stewardship planning, support for staff and volunteers, and daily attention to the practical details that allow a forever organization to keep its word. Conservation, as Jason has modeled it, is both visionary and personal. It requires legal agreements and financial planning, but it also requires trust, listening, humility and a willingness to think beyond one’s own lifetime.



Celebration of the office moving to the Tom & Jane Dustin Nature Preserve in 2006.



Leading a Creek Stomp at Hathaway Preserve at Ross Run.

A forester by training, a minister by calling and a conservation leader by vocation, Jason brought a distinctive blend of practical expertise and spiritual depth to his role. His love of trees began early; Jason has shared that, at age five, he declared that his life's vocation would be caring for trees. He stayed true to that calling, earning a degree in forestry from Purdue University and later a master's degree in ministry from Bethel University.

Before joining ACRES, he served as curator of trees for the North Carolina Zoo and as natural resources administrator and forester for the City of Indianapolis. That background gave him experience managing land, people, programs and public responsibilities—skills that would serve ACRES well for two decades.

Yet, Jason's leadership has never been defined by resume alone. It has been defined by an understanding of land as a living inheritance. He has often pointed to Abraham Lincoln's reminder: "Laws change; people die; the land remains." For ACRES, those words capture the heart of the mission. Preserves are not protected for a season, a campaign or a single generation. They are protected so that forests can mature, wetlands can function, streams can run clear, wildlife can find refuge and people not yet born can one day walk trails beneath trees that are older than they are.

During Jason's tenure, ACRES also deepened its identity as a community organization. Its preserves offer places for reflection, discovery, learning and connection. Members and volunteers have invested time, energy and resources because they believe, as Jason does, that protected land matters. Trails, old-growth remnants, ravines, prairies, wetlands, working lands and river corridors all carry stories of generosity and care. Each protected place represents a decision by someone to look ahead and choose permanence over short-term use.

Jason's next chapter started on August 1 at the Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center, where he serves as executive director. This role brings together two themes that have shaped his life: conservation and ministry. Merry Lea, part of Goshen College, provides environmental education, public programming, research and a place for people of all ages to better understand and care for the natural world. In announcing the transition, Jason described the move as a rare opportunity to bring both of his callings together. That sense of calling was visible throughout his service at ACRES, where he has treated land protection not simply as a profession, but as an act of stewardship. Jason would be the first to remind us that ACRES is not built around one person, but around a mission durable enough to guide many hands across many years.



Celebrating ACRES' 50th birthday with some of its founders, including the Ellenwoods, Heemstras, Barretts and Eberharts.

As the board begins to search for a new executive director, I am confident that Jason has imbued the organization with the founding members' fundamental promise—to protect land forever.

“Jason has helped ACRES become an organization that is clearer in its purpose, broader in its support and better prepared to honor its commitments far into the future.”

As ACRES reflects on Jason’s 20 years of leadership, gratitude is the right word. Gratitude for the land protected during his tenure. Gratitude for the landowners who found in ACRES a trustworthy partner. Gratitude for the members and volunteers whose support helped the organization grow. Gratitude for the staff and board members who worked alongside him to carry the mission forward. And gratitude for Jason’s steady insistence that forever is not a slogan, but a responsibility.

Twenty years is a remarkable span of service. In conservation, it is also just the beginning of what that service makes possible. The trees Jason helped protect will keep growing. The wetlands, prairies, rivers and forests entrusted to ACRES will continue their quiet work. Children who have never heard his name may one day step onto an ACRES trail and experience the wonder of a place kept whole because people before them chose to care.

With admiration and appreciation, ACRES honors Jason Kissel’s 20 years of leadership. His legacy lives in acres protected, relationships strengthened and a promise renewed: the land remains, and because of his work, more of it will remain protected forever.



Jason visiting with ACRES founder Ethyle Bloch.

photos by Jarrod Spicer

Leatherman Family Natural Area

ACRES is always looking for opportunities to add to existing preserves since larger contiguous properties provide better support systems for plants and animals. The newly-protected Leatherman Family Natural Area does just that while securing the health of water resources within a local community.

Just outside downtown Albion, Indiana, ACRES protects Little Lake, its shoreline and surrounding woodlands thanks to two families who donated the land in 2018. This donation created the 24-acre Richman Tipton Preserve at Little Lake.

So when the preserve's neighbor, Keith Leatherman, reached out with interest in donating an additional 6.7 acres of connective wetland to the east that flows into Little Lake, it provided a wonderful opportunity to increase protection of local wetlands and actively support water health in the area.



The generous donation of the Leatherman Family Natural Area is a reminder of the importance and impact of neighbors. Leatherman owning property directly adjacent to an ACRES preserve allowed him to watch the work we do over the course of years, which gave him confidence that this was the best choice for ensuring his wetlands are preserved in perpetuity. This protection guarantees that neighboring residents will continue to benefit from the important role this ecosystem plays in the community.

These benefits come into play in several important ways in more urbanized environments. By protecting wetlands adjacent to these communities, we are better able to conserve natural hydrology, which helps mitigate seasonal flooding and erosion, provide replenishment of groundwater and ensure that conversations about necessary work include opportunities to soften its impacts on surrounding natural resources.

Leatherman Family Natural Area provides additional support for the plants and animals that already call Little Lake home, allowing a point of retreat amid suburban pressures. Less than a mile away is Lloyd W. Bender Memorial Forest.

The Leatherman Family Natural Area is closed to the public to protect this sensitive habitat.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Eric Fisher

Eric Fisher grew up exploring his family's creek. He was just a kid having fun, but those early adventures left a lasting impression. As he began his career in the city, he noticed a tendency he had while driving.

"Rivers called to me from bridges, I was compelled to look and would feel a sense of longing. When I moved to the city, I wondered if the rivers beckoned me back to my childhood. One day, I said, 'You know what? I think I'm a river guy!'"

Fisher started his kayaking journey, exploring waterways and becoming more passionate. He took his family on kayaking excursions to appreciate these hidden habitats. Eventually, he and his wife moved to semi-retire in LaGrange County, right along Turkey Creek. The Eel River, Pigeon River and Fawn River became some of his well-loved water trails, though Turkey Creek remains his favorite.

Fisher's kayaking had long connected him to watersheds. He soon found himself on the board for the Maumee Watershed Alliance (MWA), a nonprofit that aims to improve local water quality. The broad connectivity of waterways didn't click until he met a farmer through MWA. On an outing to an agriculture field, two samples of soil were brought together for comparison. One sample was from the farmer's field, moist, dark soil, rich with organic matter. The other sample was from a neighboring field that didn't use cover crops or manage runoff. It was dry and crumbling, with no evident nutrients. This visual was striking, and the concepts of watersheds, runoff and connectivity clicked for him.

"No matter the surface, there's runoff and I began to see it as a 'shared area.' Regardless of who owns the land, it's everyone's business what runs off of it!"

As a landlord and owner of historic buildings, Fisher is no stranger to shared spaces. He is committed to improving shared common spaces, like exteriors, landscaping, hallways and more.



"The soil example was pivotal for me. I got excited that farms could be managed with watersheds in mind."

The passion for clean water led Fisher to join a group of volunteers doing water testing in association with the LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation District Water Quality Monitoring Program. Every Wednesday for the last two years, he spends the day traveling to 13 locations in the county, including two stops at the Fawn River. The hope is that this data will inform management practices and encourage change.

Fisher values volunteering, and intentionally schedules free time for it. In addition to water testing, he is the volunteer preserve steward of Fawn River Nature Preserve. He saw the preserve was in need of adoption in an ACRES email, and though he had never visited before, jumped at the opportunity. Familiar with owning and managing properties, Fisher prioritizes routine checks, so committing to frequent visits and management felt like a natural fit.

"I think it's a very special place! The trail follows an ancient moraine. It's got a very open feel, and I love being able to look over the Fawn River."

The Fishers support many organizations, and as their passion for conservation grew, they found ACRES. They are proud to have been monthly donors since 2016.

Thank you, Eric Fisher, for sharing your passion for conservation and clean water with ACRES and others!





Leaves float lazily on Cedar Creek as it flows through LaSalle Family Natural Area.

FALL HIKES & EVENTS

RSVP for events by visiting acreslandtrust.org/events or calling 260-637-2273. **M** Member Events

PREMIERE EVENTS

💧 LIVE MUSIC ON THE LAKE

📅 **FRIDAY, SEPT. 18** ⌚ **6–8 pm**
📍 **Lucerne Park Amphitheater at Pike Lake in Warsaw | Kosciusko County**

Celebrate our Year of Water with an evening of music! ACRES has partnered with the City of Warsaw and the Lilly Center for Lakes and Streams for a free lakeside concert! Groove to the smooth sounds of the Todd Harrold Band as you overlook Pike Lake, one of Warsaw's natural lakes carved by glaciers. Bring your own lawn chairs and drinks.

💧 PICNIC ON THE POND

📅 **SUNDAY, OCT. 4** ⌚ **11 am–2 pm**
📍 **Greenhurst Commons | DeKalb County**

Celebrate our Year of Water with an afternoon picnic beside the pond! ACRES has partnered with Daylily Estates winery and Rune Restaurant to bring a fun, edible experience to the nature preserve! To learn more and buy your ticket, visit acreslandtrust.org/events.

💧 WATER MONITORING DEMO

📅 **WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 9** ⌚ **6–7:30 pm**

📅 **Fawn River Nature Preserve | LaGrange County**
The LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation District Water Quality Monitoring Program tracks the health of local waterways. Hike with us to the Fawn River for a live water testing demonstration. Learn about the specialized equipment and find out how you can get involved in water monitoring projects! Hosted by volunteers Patrick Wiltshire and Eric Fisher. Space is limited. *RSVP by September 7.*

💧 FOREST BATHING **M**

Experience the practice of forest bathing with certified guide Christy Knecht, who will lead you through mindful exercises designed to deepen your connection with nature. Leave feeling refreshed, grounded and more attuned to the rhythms of the forest around you.

📅 **SUNDAY, SEPT. 20** ⌚ **2–4:30 pm**
📍 **Bicentennial Woods | Allen County**
Space is limited. *RSVP by September 18.*

📅 **SUNDAY, OCT. 18** ⌚ **2–4:30 pm**
📍 **Hathaway Preserve at Ross Run | Wabash County**
Space is limited. *RSVP by October 16.*



SEED COLLECTION WORKDAYS

Help us harvest native seeds alongside fellow volunteers. The seeds will be used for upcoming restoration projects on ACRES preserves. The workday will begin with a short introduction to plant identification and harvesting techniques; no prior experience necessary. All equipment provided. Long pants and closed-toe shoes recommended.

📅 **WEDNESDAY, OCT. 28** ⌚ **5:30–7 pm**
📍 **Heinzerling Family Five Points Nature Preserve | DeKalb County**

Hosted by ACRES Stewardship Manager Jenna Bair. Space is limited. *RSVP by October 26.*

📅 **WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 30** ⌚ **5:30–7 pm**
📍 **Pehkokia Woods | Huntington County**

Hosted by ACRES Stewardship Manager Gavin King. Space is limited. *RSVP by September 28.*



💧 POETRY HIKE

📅 **SUNDAY, OCT. 11** ⌚ **2–3:30 pm**
📍 **Edna W. Spurgeon Woodland Reserve | Noble County**

Hike through the rolling ravines and learn about the natural features of the preserve. With each stop, enjoy an accompanying poem from by local poet Jenna Wysong Filbrun. Her poetry collection, *Running Toward Water*, will be available for purchase, with proceeds going to ACRES. Space is limited. *RSVP by October 9.*

Preserve maps available online at acreslandtrust.org/preserves

POPP OPEN HOUSE

 **SATURDAY, OCT. 17**  **1–4 pm**

 **Emanuel M. Popp Nature Preserve | Allen County**
12129 Tonkel Road, Fort Wayne, IN 46845

Warm up at the campfire or take a hike through the forested trails at this preserve open only once a year to ACRES members. Light snacks and refreshments provided. Hosted by Popp caretaker Tom Gardner and volunteers Larry Biggerstaff, Louise and Keith Pomeroy. Space is limited. **RSVP by October 15.**



HISTORY HIKE

 **SUNDAY, OCT. 25**  **1–3 pm**

 **Wing Haven | Steuben County**

Step into the past as ACRES archiving volunteers bring the preserve's past to life with tales of how nature and human history have shaped these special places over the decades. Space is limited. **RSVP by October 23.**



RECHARGING OUR WETLANDS FALL HIKE

 **TUESDAY, OCT. 27**  **5–6:30 pm**

 **Bicentennial Woods | Allen County**

Join local geologist and hydrologist Tony Fleming for a unique multi-season exploration of how wetlands work throughout the year. By revisiting the same trails across different seasons, you'll witness the dynamic changes in water levels, plant life and wildlife. Watch as seasonal water level changes demonstrate how forests and wetlands naturally filter water and replenish our underground water supplies. Space is limited. **RSVP by October 25.**

HUTSELL BROGAN PRESERVE DEDICATION

 **SATURDAY, NOV. 7**  **10–11:30 am**

 **Hutsell Brogan Nature Preserve | Allen County**

Address available with RSVP

Celebrate the permanent protection of a new ACRES property in Allen County. Guests will have the opportunity to thank the donors of this special place in person, join a short hike through the woods and celebrate the joy of protecting local land together. This preserve is closed to the public. Space is limited. **RSVP by November 5.**



BOOK DISCUSSION

 **SATURDAY, NOV. 14**  **2–3:30 pm**

 **ACRES Land Trust Office | Allen County**

Join fellow members for a fall book discussion of *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes* by Dan Egan. Learn about the unique history of these lakes, the perils they face and how we can restore and preserve them. Come ready to share your thoughts! Hosted by ACRES Administrative Manager Natasha Manor and volunteer Bridgett Hernandez. Space is limited. **RSVP by November 12.**

WRITE-A-WILL WEEK

A will doesn't have to be complicated or costly. ACRES is hosting two days of free 30-minute sessions with David Van Gilder of Fletcher Van Gilder LLP, who's generously donating his time to help you put together a simple will. The only catch: we ask everyone to include at least one gift to a charity of their choice. Small ask, big impact.

Spots will fill up fast, so sign up soon! Contact Heather Barth at hbarth@acreslandtrust.org to schedule an appointment.

 **TUESDAY, OCT. 20**  **9 am–12:30 pm**

 **ACRES Office | Allen County**

THURSDAY, OCT. 22  **9 am–12:30 pm**

 **Fletcher Van Gilder LLP | Allen County**

Fall Road Trips Worth the Drive

Fall is for wandering—windows down, a hot drink in the cup holder and a little detour off the main road. This season, we've mapped out two easy loops through ACRES country, each one pairing a favorite local coffee shop or lunch stop with a string of preserves at their colorful best. Pick a route, grab a friend and see where the day takes you.



Robb Hidden Canyon



Marion's Woods



Fawn River

NORTH ROUTE: *Steuben & LaGrange Counties*

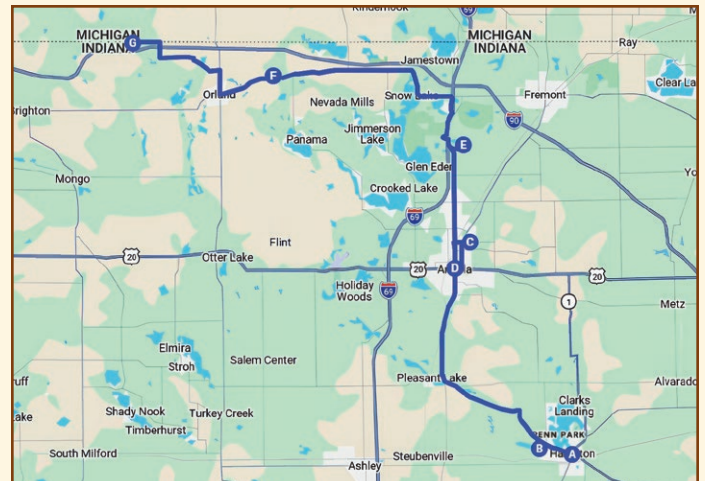
A The Green Bean Coffee & Sweet Shop
Start your morning in Hamilton, Indiana, with a fresh breakfast bite and a hot drink to carry you down the road.

B Robb Hidden Canyon – 1.6 miles
Come September, the fields fill with cheerful yellow goldenrod. As the greenery dies back later in the season, the ravine opens up into a picturesque view with a clear creek below.

C Marion's Woods – 0.4 miles
This short but sweet urban trail is an easy stop for any schedule. Mature oaks and hickories overhead put on a colorful fall display.

D Sutton's Deli
Refuel in downtown Angola with a sandwich, soup or slice of pizza before your next stop.

E Wing Haven – 1.9 miles
Rolling fields and forested ravines make this a favorite spot to take in the changing colors. Watch for migrating waterfowl resting on the glacially carved kettle hole lake.



F Ropchan Memorial Nature Preserve
Recent storm damage has affected trail conditions here, so check acreslandtrust.org/preserves for the latest update before adding this stop to your route.

G Fawn River Nature Preserve – 1.5 miles
Hike along an ancient moraine lined with golden beech and maple before reaching the clear waters of the Fawn River. Find a bench along the bank and take in the view and the sound of the river.

SOUTH ROUTE: *Allen, Huntington & Wabash Counties*



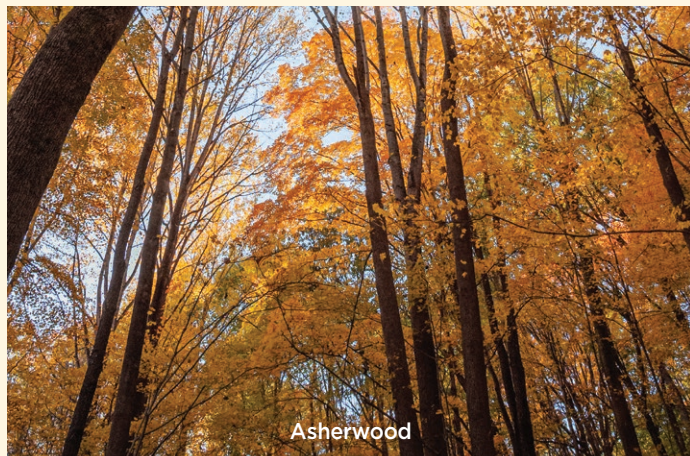
Fogwell Forest



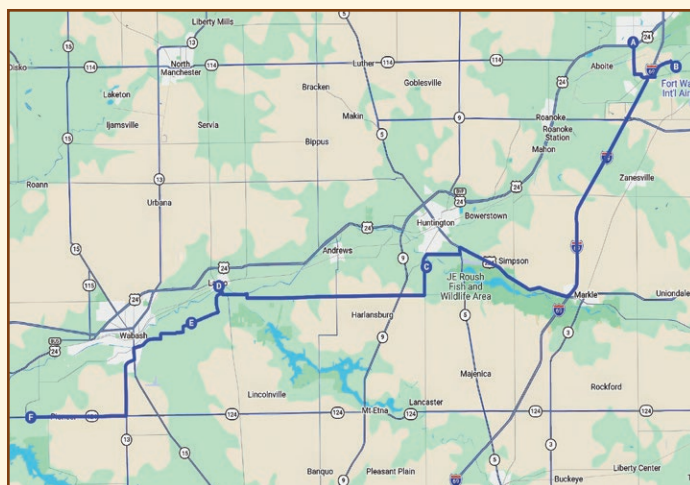
Tel-Hy



Hathaway at Ross Run



Asherwood



A The Hive Coffee House

Kick off your day in southwest Fort Wayne with a seasonal drink and a bite from this neighborhood favorite.

B Fogwell Forest – 1.4 miles

This trail has a mix of field and forest, bringing golden grasses alongside oaks and beech trees.

C Tel-Hy – 0.8 miles

The trail opens into a field framed by colorful trees, then winds deeper to a bluff-top view of the Wabash River.

D 950 Speakeasy Bistro

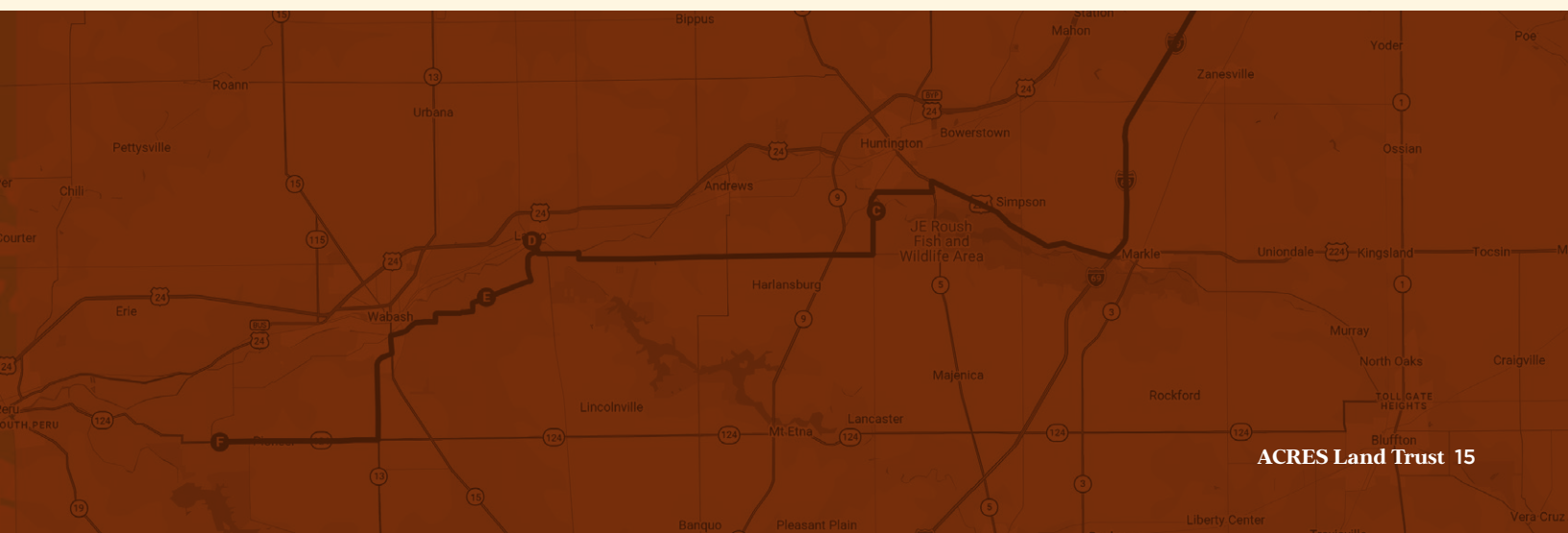
Grab a sub or pizza in downtown Lagro and enjoy it out on the patio.

E Hathaway Preserve at Ross Run – 2 miles

This preserve is gorgeous this time of year. As undergrowth dies back, visibility improves down the steep cliffs to the waterfalls below.

F Asherwood – 2.4 miles

The bright maple forest invites you to explore along Asher Creek and through the ravines. The ponds and vernal pools may be quiet without frogs and insects, but keep watch for migrating birds overhead.





Dawn Ritchie
Former Board President

I served on the ACRES Land Trust Board from 2016 to 2024, including three years as its president. It was a great pleasure and honor to work with Jason as he championed our organization.

I was always impressed with his calm demeanor, wisdom and passion. I observed Jason many times advocating for our organization's mission to prospective donors, partners, landowners and board members.

His knowledge and enthusiasm are captivating and convincing. Jason had a tremendous impact in expanding ACRES' reach into northern Indiana and into parts of Ohio and Michigan. I'm particularly fond of a time when I accompanied him on a visit with a landowner in Fort Wayne. This property has the potential to be an urban preserve in an ever-growing community surrounded by increasing development. Jason knows how important it is to save gems like this property in areas of urban sprawl so that we can create opportunities for residents to experience nature in the city.

I was so impressed with Jason's caring attitude as we walked the property with the owner. The owner relishes his property, and Jason showed this owner how he and ACRES would show the same kind of appreciation for the property as we protect the land forever. Jason took the time to study the property prior to the visit. He pointed out to the owner and me the different varieties of flora and fauna. His admiration for the trees really struck us. It was clear that Jason felt like he belonged in these woods. As he walked along the property, he showed such esteem for his surroundings, the natural environment. It was as if Jason had lived in these woods his whole life. I personally know the property owner, and he shared with me that when it's time, he recognizes that his property would be in the best hands with ACRES, especially with Jason at the helm.

We will miss Jason as our leader, advocate and spokesperson. He has taken ACRES to new levels, and we are a better organization as a result of Jason's impactful tenure. I wish him the best of luck in his new endeavors. The Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center will be in great and nurturing hands!



Steve Hammer
Former Board President

Jason and I had many conversations over the years I served as board president. Some of those long, coffee shop conversations were hard ones, in the sense that easy answers seemed nowhere to be found.

But, through all those conversations, two things were evident to me. First, Jason was absolutely committed to the mission of ACRES, even when its board struggled to articulate the mission. And second, whatever the mission, Jason's ultimate focus was on the people involved.

ACRES may seem to be all about natural areas, but really, it is about people. The donors, the staff, the visitors, the neighbors, the volunteers, the stories that make each tract of land a special place. Early on, Jason realized that having conversations with prospective land donors sometimes involved more than just the natural area that a family owned. To better understand those family dynamics, Jason enrolled in a psychology class at Huntington University on family dynamics and relationships. He realized that the people element of the equation could be the most challenging part. The stories of those people often became the most rewarding aspect, when those conversations yielded a newly protected natural area.

ACRES already had a robust history when Jason arrived in 2006, and he deeply respected that. Early on, he sought out conversations with the few surviving founders, helping bridge their vision for ACRES as it entered a new century. Despite ACRES' long history, Jason recognized the importance of fresh thinking and periodic strategic discussions with the board. He knew that his role was to focus on drawing out that vision as articulated in the 21st century. This vision was essential to drive his everyday agenda for the staff.

Jason's ability and willingness to grapple with hard questions help carry forward ACRES' mission, even as he moves on in his new journey. Will we ever forget hearing Jason say, "protecting natural areas forever"? I hope not.



Brittany Hall
ACRES Board President

When I think about Jason, what stands out most is his ability to inspire people to think beyond the present and imagine what ACRES could become decades from now.

In the relatively short time I had the privilege of working with him, it became clear that Jason's passion for protecting land forever was more than a mission; it was a vision. He deeply understood the responsibility of preserving natural spaces, but he also recognized that fulfilling that mission required ACRES to evolve. Rather than simply maintaining what had been built, he challenged the board to think proactively about how we could strengthen the organization for generations to come.

I remember board discussions where Jason encouraged us to explore ideas that, at first, felt ambitious. He spoke about developing new sources of earned revenue, including partnering with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources on stewardship projects that could both advance conservation and create sustainable income for ACRES. He also wasn't afraid to ask bold questions about protecting large tracts of land, opportunities that required us to think beyond what seemed immediately possible.

What impressed me most was that Jason never presented these ideas as dreams detached from reality. He paired vision with purpose, helping the board see that long-term conservation depends on long-term sustainability. He inspired us to think bigger, plan further ahead and believe that ACRES could accomplish more than we imagined.

Jason, thank you for your unwavering commitment to protecting the places that make our region special. Your passion challenged all of us to think bigger, and your legacy will continue to shape ACRES for generations to come. It has been an honor to serve alongside you.



Jason hand-signed every year-end letter sent to members — a task that took days to complete.

A New Chapter for the Volunteer Program

As ACRES grows, so do our partnerships, events and volunteer program. They've grown enough that we've split what was one role into two. Reena Ramos continues as Outreach Manager, leading events and partnerships, while Susan Graber steps into a new role as Volunteer Manager, leading the volunteer program day-to-day.

Many of you already know Susan from her year as our Advancement Specialist. She holds a master's degree and is passionate about connecting people, organizations and the natural world—a great fit for the volunteer program. In her own words:



"It's great to meet you! Volunteers are the heartbeat of ACRES, and I look forward to building on the strong foundation already in place, getting to know more of you, and continuing to grow this program together. Please don't hesitate to reach out—my door (and inbox) is always open."

— Susan Graber, Volunteer Manager | sgrab@acreslandtrust.org | (260) 637-2273 ext. 108

Reena Ramos continues on as Outreach Manager and will keep building on ACRES' growing slate of events and partnerships across the region. Reena shared her thoughts on the transition:



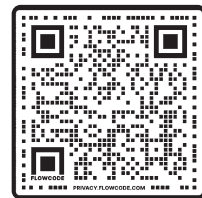
"I couldn't be more excited about what this split means for both programs. Susan's passion for connecting people with opportunities makes her a perfect fit to lead the volunteer program, and I know it's in good hands. I'll miss leading the day-to-day work with our volunteers, but I'll still be right alongside all of you on projects and events throughout the year. Thank you for everything you do to make our mission possible—I can't wait to see what this next year brings for both of our programs."

— Reena Ramos, Outreach Manager | rramos@acreslandtrust.org | (260) 637-2273 ext. 109

wish list

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

acreslandtrust.org/wishlist



VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS

Our generous volunteers have donated 771 hours since our last *Quarterly* was published.

Volunteers are the heart of ACRES. In monetary terms, that's \$25,150.02. In ACRES terms, that's volunteers helping with everything from keeping trails clear for hikers, removing invasive plants from preserves, working in the native garden, sending mailings out, hosting events, staffing booths, working in the archives to preserve our history, and so many other things that help ACRES every single day.



Steve Berlin

One of our long-time volunteers is Steve Berlin. He has donated 315.5 hours! He helps by trail monitoring, removing invasive plants and serving as the preserve steward at Bicentennial Woods and McNabb-Walter Nature Preserve. He is also currently helping with preserve steward duties at the Tom and Jane Dustin, Robert C. and

Rosella C. Johnson preserves. Steve is known for being quick with a smile and for lending a helping hand whenever things need to be done.

To Steve and all of our volunteers, we offer a heartfelt "thank you."



Ongoing Events

Boots & Brews—Come Join Us!

📅 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.



HIKES & BITES

📅 4TH FRIDAY OF THE MONTH

🕒 10 am

Explore the trails during this casual hiking series led by ACRES volunteers. Afterward, join the group for a local lunch spot. More information at acreslandtrust.org/events.

PARTNERSHIP EVENTS

Grief Hikes with Stillwater Hospice

📅 3RD FRIDAY OF THE MONTH

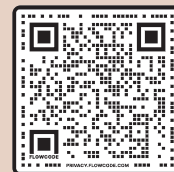
🕒 10 am

Stillwater Hospice is partnering with ACRES for guided Grief Hikes. Join a group hike to process grief in nature.

260-435-3261

GriefCenter@stillwater-hospice.org

Scan the QR code or go to stillwater-hospice.org/complementary-grief-programs.





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Come, Little Leaves

by George Cooper

"Come, little leaves," said the wind one day,
"Come o'er the meadows with me and play;
Put on your dresses of red and gold,
For summer is gone and the days grow cold."

Soon as the leaves heard the wind's loud call,
Down they came fluttering, one and all;
Over the brown fields they danced and flew,
singing the glad little songs they knew.

"Cricket, goodbye, we've been friends so long;
Little brook, sing us your farewell song;
Say you are sorry to see us go;
Ah, you will miss us, right well we know."

"Dear little lambs in your fleecy fold,
Mother will keep you from harm and cold;
Fondly we watched you in vale and glade;
Say, will you dream of our loving shade?"

Dancing and whirling, the little leaves went;
Winter had called them, and they were content;
Soon, fast asleep in their earthy beds,
The snow laid a coverlid over their heads.

photo by Shane Perfect