Representing Allen, Auglaize, Hancock, Hardin, Mercer, Putnam, and Van Wert Counties.

Rooted Horizons

PRESERVING OUR ROOTS TODAY TO ENSURE HEALTHY HORIZONS IN THE FUTURE

Easements, easements, easements and easements and easements!!!! Over the past year we have completed five, yes five easements for a grand total of 748 acres of additional preserved farmland. This brings our easement total to 17 completed to date representing 1554 acres of preserved land in west central Ohio. We thank all of our landowners for their patience in the completion of their easements in what seems to be an agonizingly slow process, especially with the paid conservation easement programs. We would like to take the opportunity to say that the private easement program we offer is typically much faster, more flexible in its terms and still offers the potential federal tax benefit to the landowner. The tax benefit alone can be a big help to a landowner that is facing uncertain agricultural income. We encourage everyone to take a close look at this option.

Our 2017 newsletter ended with our activity through about August of that year just before the beginning of the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s 2018 Local Ag Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) local sponsor certification process. WCOLC once again submitted for certification in order to participate in the 2018 LAEPP. We were notified in mid-November that we were accepted as a local sponsor and certified to accept landowner applications in Allen County, the county we are currently concentrating our efforts with this paid program.

2017 Annual Meeting

While work was taking place with the certification process, planning was well underway for our annual program scheduled for November 15, 2017. Our featured speaker was Mr. David Neuhardt from Tecumseh Land Trust with the topic of Still Learning and Growing, a story of how Tecumseh Land Trust accomplished preserving the Whitehall farm near Yellow Springs, Ohio. The farm was set for auction by the heirs to the property and was likely destined to be divided into small parcels attractive for development as a result. Instead, through the efforts of the land trust and the local community, the farm has been permanently preserved insuring the long-term viability of agriculture on 940 acres of precious Ohio land. What an inspirational story with a lesson to be learned by anyone thinking about estate planning and where their property will end up in the future.

Smart Phone Technology

Keeping up with technology is an on-going effort and 2017 WCOLC up-graded its phone from a basic cell phone to a Smart Phone providing the ability to take pictures without carrying an extra piece of equipment when we visit farms for monitoring. In addition, we added a lap top computer to our inventory of equipment that is used as a central repository for WCOLC electronic files. The new Smart Phone was put to good use during our easement monitoring in the fall.

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There were eleven easements that required various Board members to schedule a time with the landowners for a visit and the required annual monitoring. This is a simple process for the landowner who can opt to meet with us if they like but is not absolutely necessary. This work insures that the terms of the conservation easement are being abided by. We try to review the easement terms with the landowner during our visit just as a reminder.

aboard to both of you. See related articles about our two new members (page 4). Many, many thanks to senior board members, Ron Miller and Gary Steinbrunner, as their terms on the board ended. We wish them luck as they take on their next adventures in life!

**Leadership Role in COLT**

Our organization was asked to join the Coalition of Ohio Land Trusts (COLT) steering committee. COLT is a state organization of Ohio land trusts that meets periodically either directly or via conference call to discuss topics (both Ohio and national) of interest to our organizations and to advocate land preservation to our state representatives and other leaders in Ohio. The group has been effective in gaining support from state officials on issues facing land trusts in Ohio.

**LAEPP Update**

As in the past, the beginning of a new year always brings on the next application period for the LAEPP and 2018 was no exception. Following our round of advertising, we began working with several landowner in Allen County who expressed interest in applying to the program. The process is lengthy involving talking with landowners, preparing applications, sorting out the most promising applications that will be competitive and submitting the applications to ODA both electronically and in hard copy if we are seeking funding for a particular property conservation easement. Once submitted, ODA performs a thorough review of the applications that are eventually brought before a controlling board for final review and acceptance. This whole process takes from near the beginning of the year until mid-June when we are notified as to whether our landowners have been accepted into the program. WCOLC was fortunate to get one landowner into the program in 2018. Work on this easement is underway with the required 90 year look back in the title search of the property. This is a very important step in the process which insures that the property has a clear title with no potential of someone laying claim to the property once the conservation easement is in place.

**Policy Committee Update**

While all of the above active have been taking place the Policy Committee has continued to develop important policies that help insure our organization is in conformance with the Standards and Practices put forth by the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), the guiding organization for all well-organized land trusts. One item that came out of the LTA webinars we have been participating in is the importance of how we acknowledge stewardship donations. This is a far too complicated of a topic to get into any detail here so suffice it to say WCOLC has to be very careful to insure compliance with IRS regulations for non-profits. We are working with an outside attorney who is knowledgeable of this topic specific to land trusts and has provided guidance in the content of our acknowledgement letters to help insure compliance with IRS regulations. In addition, the Policy Committee also undertook the revision of our Mission Statement to consolidate it to reflect our core purpose, developed a new more comprehensive landowner questionnaire designed to help WCOLC better understand a landowner’s interests in preserving their land, and developed a Preliminary Project Evaluation & Assessment Tool to enhance and replace the Land Criteria policy that we had been using. For the coming short term, another strategic plan has been developed and is in the process of being reviewed prior to adoption.

*—Jim Spurgat*

WCOLC Secretary
Sincere Appreciation For Continued Commitment To WCOLC

Change is a common theme that draws the constant attention of every organization and is widely addressed in oral and written communication. As visitors to this newsletter have read before, the WCOLC is no exception and it is time to look at change once again. After six years as president of the WCOLC, I will be stepping down from this office at the conclusion of 2018. I will continue to serve on the Board and help our organization grow.

In this newsletter you will read a yearly summary, the highlights of WCOLC that took place during twenty eighteen. As I look back over the past several newsletters, I note that there are consistent “core” events such as easements, annual meetings, outreach that take place on an annual basis and are familiar to our readers.

Less familiar, but just as constant, are the external/ internal developments that are dealt with, often on a more frequent basis. Changes to government programs like the federal Farm Bill, the states Ag easement program, and to those within local governments. On other fronts, are the cooperative ventures with other land trusts, public agencies and educational institutions. Internally, there are changes in Board membership, organizational need and direction to name a very few.

All of the above represent challenges that, I believe, the WCOLC has strived to meet since our inception in 2006. Many have been successes and some have not. Looking to the future, The WCOLC will strive to grow our list of accomplishments and to meet the constant challenges that come its way. To do this the WCOLC will need to welcome new Board members and build membership; strengthen the workings of our organization internally; build and expand upon cooperative ventures and outreach.

I personally thank those that have given and those that continue to give their time in volunteer service to the WCOLC. My sincere appreciation goes out to all the membership and contributors for your commitment to support the WCOLC. Together you make up the WCOLC.

I would be remiss here, if I did not extend a special “thank you” to Mr. Jim Heinrich. Jim has served as a Board of Director hail- ing from Auglaize county, the WCOLC’s only treasurer, and understandable has decided to step down from the role of treasurer at the conclusion of this year. Fortunately for the WCOLC, Jim decided to serve an additional term as a Board of Director. We appreciate the wealth of knowledge and insight Jim brings to the Conservancy. Jim has always been an unwavering benefactor for the WCOLC. Thank you again for your great service! I encourage all to express their gratitude in your own way.

-Bill Roshak
WCOLC President
Welcome Tyler Black to the Board of Directors

I’m Tyler Black and I joined the board of the WCOLC in 2018. I grew up in Allen County and attended Bath High School. I went on to receive a Bachelor of Science Degree in Wildlife and Fish Conservation and Management from Hocking College and the University of Rio Grande.

From there I moved and worked for the USDA Forest Service in Colorado and Idaho for three years, doing wildlife and habitat surveys. I married my wife shortly before we moved to Colorado in 2014. We quickly realized that family and being close to home meant a lot. We moved back to Allen County in 2015, where I began working for the Johnny Appleseed Metropolitan Park District where I am currently the Deputy Director.

Once moving back, my wife and I quickly started a family, we have two children, a two year old and a nine month old. I enjoy bowhunting and fishing in my spare time. I also enjoy hiking and camping with family on public and private lands throughout Ohio.

I joined WCOLC because land conservation, whether it be agricultural land or wildlife habitat in the seven county area is close to my heart. I want my children and my grandchildren to have the same experiences and opportunity that I have been afforded, and most of those begin in rural, non-developed settings.

I am proud of the work we are doing through the WCOLC and look fondly to the future!

-Tyler Black

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”
- Helen Keller

Welcome Mitch Kingsley to the Board of Directors

Mitch Kingsley joined the Board in 2018. Growing up in Berne, Indiana, and finishing high school in Sylvania, Ohio, Kingsley developed connections in a number of communities. He graduated Bluffton College in 1971 with a B.S. degree in Philosophy.

From 1973 to 1993 Mitch and Ann – with their eventual family of 3 children – shared life as members of Plow Creek Fellowship in Tiskilwa, Illinois. After taking the J.D. degree from Loyola University of Chicago School of Law, Mitch practiced law in Illinois for 9 years.

Since moving to Ohio in 1993 Kingsley has served the community of Bluffton as a member of the Samuel W. Diller CO, LPA law firm and as a Village Council member (2000-2014; 2018-?). He served as a member of the Schowalter Foundation in Newton, Kansas from 1999 – 2017, chairing that Board for the last 10 years.

Mitch likes to ride his bicycle for health and transportation. Highlights of 2018 include a trip to Europe and planting 170 trees in a riparian field along the Riley Creek. Mitch and Ann are members of First Mennonite Church of Bluffton.

Kingsley said that efforts to conserve our precious farmland and steering our overall land use for long term sustainability are motivators for him. The WCOLC work allows him to put these values to work.
“A BENEFIT TO ALL”

As detailed elsewhere in this newsletter, WCOLC has now been in existence for over 10 years and holds 17 conservation easements...and counting. The amount of work that has gone into putting these easements in place has been staggering and comes with further costs and obligations to WCOLC. So, let's look briefly at how WCOLC meets these costs and obligations and the key role that the “stewardship donation” plays for all of the participants in the easement process.

A fundamental purpose of WCOLC is to assist landowners to protect their land for future use according to their wishes, but also consistent with recognized conservation practices. WCOLC has a duty to ensure that it has the resources to undertake the rigorous process of obtaining a conservation easement that will provide the desired protection and also ensuring that its terms will be observed forever. No small task! One of the primary means that WCOLC relies on to achieve these objectives is through the landowner (or grantor) agreeing to donate a portion of the value of the easement to WCOLC. This is known as the “stewardship donation”. These monies are put into a dedicated fund to be used for such things as expenses related to obtaining the easement, to conduct the required annual monitoring to ensure the terms of the easement are being observed, and to legally defend the easement if violations of its terms occur.

Besides being critical to WCOLC, a stewardship donation can be very beneficial to the landowner in that the landowner may be entitled to take a federal tax deduction for the amount of the donation. While WCOLC always hopes that the landowner’s interest in conservation values would be sufficient incentive to make a donation to enable WCOLC to fulfill the aforementioned obligations WCOLC cannot simply rely on such hoped-for generosity. Accordingly, after consultation with legal experts, WCOLC has recently put into place a “stewardship pledge agreement” that WCOLC believes will satisfy IRS requirements for tax deductibility of stewardship donations while at the same time providing a legal basis for WCOLC to rely on receiving the crucial stewardship donations it needs to continue to be good stewards of the easements it holds. As indicated at the outset, under this arrangement, WCOLC believes everyone benefits! If you are interested in putting a conservation easement on land you own and wish to obtain more information on stewardship donations and the stewardship pledge agreement, WCOLC would be happy to provide it.

-Ken Mauer
Board of Directors

THANK YOU TO OUR MOST RECENT CONTRIBUTORS

Connie Backlund
Bill Bassett
Bob and Carol Bertrand
Tyler Black
Neal and Allison Brady
Scott and Chris Butterworth
Bruce Comly French
Matt and Beth Graff
Jim and Jan Heinrich
The Heinrich Family Foundation
Heritage Trails Park District

Mark and Kay Hochstettler
Johnny Appleseed Metro Park District
Judith Kingsley
Mitch and Ann Kingsely
Kathy Kroetsch
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Beth Seibert
Randy Sheipline
Rick Sheipline
Jim and Karen Spurgat
Gary Steinbrunner
Tri-Moraine Audubon Society
Marvin Wilkins
Amanda Wischmeyer and Jon Tuttle
Anonymous
Show Your Support & Join Our Dedicated Organization!

Please consider supporting our work through donations, and/or volunteer opportunities. Because we are an independent, all-volunteer, nonprofit organization we rely on you for financial support to help us promote stewardship, educational programs, and work with landowners to develop conservation easements to protect land with natural, recreational, scenic, historic, or productive value including farmland, forests, riparian corridors, etc. We invite you to join us...

West Central Ohio Land Conservancy
P.O. Box 503, Lima, Ohio 45802

Name: _________________________________ [ ] I/We wish to remain anonymous

Address: ________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ Email: ________________________

Enclosed is my/our gift of: [ ] Basic $25 [ ] Supporting $50
[ ] Partner $100 [ ] Conservator $250
[ ] Benefactor $500 [ ] Legacy $1000 [ ] Other ________

[ ] I want to learn more about the WCOLC and volunteer opportunities, contact me!

The WCOLC is a 501(c)(3) organization meaning all donations are tax-deductible. Please make checks payable to the West Central Ohio Land Conservancy. Know that 100% of your contribution goes to and benefits the WCOLC.

The WCOLC will not share your name or information with other organizations.