



CENTRAL  
INDIANA  
LAND TRUST

Spring 2018



## From the Leadership



### CENTRAL INDIANA LAND TRUST

*Preserving the Heartland*



*Cliff Chapman*

Last fall I began reading Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* to my three-year old son. Of course, I had heard of it and knew the basic plot, but I must confess I cried on the last page with the line "Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack." A second confession - working in nature conservation might have given me a different perspective on what it means to protect a forest.

Through your support, CILTI has protected thousands of acres of forest from axes that hack. But, there is a difference between protecting a forest and protecting a tree. Not every individual tree in our preserves and conservation easements are protected from the axe. We do allow sustainable timber harvesting on several of our conservation easements. We take great consideration to carefully review any timber management plans on easements before any action is taken. And we simply do not allow clear cuts based on the weak science supporting them.

In forests owned and managed by CILTI, using the best available science as our guide, we occasionally thin forests of shade loving species like sugar maples to favor species like oak as a part of our natural area management. We are also adding prescribed burning to our box of tools as we work to best manage our preserves. We see plants like dryland blueberry in preserves starving for light, species that have likely been on the property for hundreds if not thousands of years and struggling to survive with fire suppression. After successfully executing our first controlled burn at a planted prairie, as you can read about on page 7, we are now working on plans to reintroduce fire in oak woodlands forest to release native plants and be good stewards of the land.

Something that we are very excited about this year is the planting of thousands of trees within a National Natural Landmark. When the Landmark design was created back in 1973 for Meltzer Woods in Shelby County, fields along its west side were included with the idea of planting them with trees. Forty-five years later, we are doing it. What makes this planting extra special?

During my first visit with Phil Meltzer, he pointed out two enormous white oaks (one of the old growth species documented at Meltzer Woods in Alton Lindsey's Natural Areas of Indiana) and said, "these are the last two, I guess when they are gone we won't have white oak anymore." They fell over about 15 years ago, but we are planting 2,500 of them along with other oaks, hickories, walnuts, redbuds and dogwoods this spring. It is your continued support, joined with hundreds of other CILTI members, that will forever protect them from axes that hack.

Cliff Chapman  
*Executive Director*

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#### On the Cover:



*American Woodcock*

# Where there's a will there's a way...

to make a gift that lasts for conservation in Central Indiana.

By including the Central Indiana Land Trust in your will, your passion for nature serves as a legacy for generations to come.

The Burr Oak Society was established in recognition of CILTI's donors who have created such a legacy. If you have made a provision for the Central Indiana Land Trust in your will or trust, please let us know so we can include you as a member of the Burr Oak Society and thank you during your lifetime.

## Members of the Burr Oak Society

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If you would like more information about including the Land Trust in your plans and becoming a member of the Burr Oak Society, please contact Rachel at [reble@conservingindiana.org](mailto:reble@conservingindiana.org) or 317-631-5263.



## 253 Mule Ridge Conservation Easement

From time to time, the Central Indiana Land Trust is asked to comment on environmental issues that aren't always directly related to conservation - topics like energy, air pollution or water pollution. We do not advocate on those issues and generally reply that we are a nature conservation organization and work directly on the protection of natural areas.

But what about when an environmental issue directly impacts nature conservation? What about wind turbines? Producing energy from wind is a quickly growing form of renewable energy in Indiana. Sustainable, renewable energy is generally a good thing for conserving our land, but in this case it raises a challenge of how to also sustain our local populations of bats. Research has shown that bats can get sucked into the vortex created by wind turbines and die. It is an unfortunate reality that comes with wind energy. In the case of Indiana bats, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determines how much habitat needs to be protected to offset those potential negative impacts.

This is how we came to protect the 253 acre Mule Ridge



Indiana Bat

### Mule Ridge CE



Map of Mule Ridge Conservation Easement.



### *Oak-hickory woodland*

Conservation Easement in Vermillion County. We received a call that a wind farm was being constructed and as part of its permit, habitat for the federally endangered Indiana bat needed to be protected to offset any potential harm the wind farm may cause to the species.

The Mule Ridge property was for sale and was a former ATV riding park. It was 400 acres mixed with open fields and forests with Raccoon Creek flowing through it. We were asked to look at the woods to consider a conservation easement over it with the understanding that the open areas would be converted into wetland habitats to benefit bats.

Normally, we would like to see the entire 400 acres grow into a forest and think beyond that size to get a forest patch large enough for forest interior species to thrive. But Indiana bats are not forest interior species, they like edge habitat and the mix of forests, wetlands and a corridor created by Raccoon Creek seemed like a perfect scenario here.

Our inspection noted that the forests were a mix of young and mature average to better than average patches that looked perfect for Indiana bats with a preponderance of shagbark hickory. The peeling bark of this cool tree is a favored

roost for bats seeking a warm and protected place to snooze during the day. More inspections were needed, however, to determine if the federally endangered species was there or not. It was.

When we conducted our field work to document the natural resource elements on the property, we found species that are often not prevalent on our preserves as we typically work in more mature forests. There is a cadre of birds that like habitat that is younger in nature and they can be found here. Woodcock, described in the Species Spotlight in this newsletter, burst out of the leaf litter right before being stepped on and there is great habitat for

willow flycatcher, orchard oriole, blue-winged warbler and the giant of the warblers: yellow-breasted chat.

In a relatively short period of time, because of a wind farm being built, a site that was once home to ATVs screaming through meadows and woods will be home to frogs, salamanders, wading birds, chats, bats and 253 acres of permanently protected habitat.



*Limestone ledge along Raccoon Creek at Mule Ridge.*

## Species Spotlight: American Woodcock

Imagine walking through the woods or an open field on a spring evening enjoying the quiet subtleness spring has to offer. Your feelings of content and bliss are interrupted when out of the blue, you're completely alarmed by a critter flying up off the ground causing commotion all around. What in the world was that?!

Otherwise known as a timberdoodle, Labrador twister, night partridge, or bog sucker, the American woodcock, *Scolopax minor*, is a sign of spring. In fact, even with a snowy start here in Central Indiana, there were many sightings earlier this year. The American woodcock is a shorebird with a long bill but unlike its relatives, it lives in young forests and shrubby fields across North America. It is a small, squatty bird with brown mottling that helps it conceal itself on the ground in leaf litter. These birds are generally very enigmatic with their camouflage plumage - except in the springtime. Not only will the birds quickly flush if stumbled upon, but males also display a very flashy aerial display for females while making loud 'peenting' calls for the females. The male will first give a loud, nasally peent call from the ground then he will fly in an upward spiral in the air. The birds can fly 200-350 feet in the sky and they will then make a zigzag descent downward usually landing close to a female where he continues his courtship display. Their sky dancing during breeding season generally occurs in forest openings or fields.

American woodcocks feed primarily on earthworms and other invertebrates found in the soil. With their long bills, they can probe the soil to forage. Often, you will see woodcocks rocking back and forth as they forage, shifting their weight from foot to foot. It is thought that the vibrations from this movement cause earthworms to move in the ground allowing the woodcock to hear the sounds.

These birds are on a conservation watch list with slow declines from the 1960s. Although woodcocks are one of the few shorebirds still hunted, hunting pressure has declined over the years and it has not been shown to have large-scale population trends on the bird. The primary concern with decline is most likely due to natural forest succession and habitat loss caused by development. CILTI owns and manages several nature preserves in Central Indiana where American woodcocks are present. We work hard to protect these areas and reduce fragmentation and habitat loss to allow animals like these birds to thrive.

A visit to one of our nature preserves on a warm spring or summer night may reward you with a charmed sighting of these delightful birds.

## Thank you for the following tributes

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## News from the Field: CILTI conducts first controlled burn

It was with great excitement that we directed our first controlled burn- ever – in 2017. Our Nonie Werbe Krauss preserve located at 116th and Eller Rd. in Fishers, was the site selected. We contracted Davey Resource Group, a division of Davey Tree Expert Company to lead the burn. This property, formerly known as the Wapihani Nature Preserve makes up 77 acres total and is located along White River.

In 2008, 19,000 tree seedlings were planted in bottomland forest on a portion of the property and the other portion of the property was planted in mixed prairie grasses and forbs to feature a restored prairie. Species found within the prairie include: prairie grasses, prairie dock, milkweed, monarch butterflies, sedge wren, grasshopper sparrow, and American woodcock. Tree islands, including mostly burr oak were also planted. The prairie is being managed to develop into an oak savanna over the next several decades.

The 27 acres of prairie on the property were the focus of the prescribed burn to help achieve our management goals including habitat restoration, control invasive species – particularly thousands of pear trees, and benefit wildlife. Fire is a natural process in natural areas and



The burr oaks planted in the prairie are very fire resistant as they thrive on fire and therefore are the principle tree in an oak savanna.



The controlled burn took place in December with everything going as planned and we are excited to see the results this summer as the prairie blooms providing improved habitat for our native plants and animals.



because uncontrolled burns rarely occur in Indiana, it is necessary to plan controlled burns to ensure ecosystems thrive. Fire is an excellent, natural management tool and can greatly benefit the land by helping to control invasive species. Generally, invasive species are intolerant of fire and will either die back or become stunted in growth.



# Year In Review - 2017

## Thanks to your support in 2017 CILTI:

- Protected Mule Ridge - 253 acres of conservation easement in Vermilion Co.
- Completed phase two of White River Bluffs for a total of 9 acres protected in Indianapolis.
- Received a grant from the Nina Mason Pulliam trust for \$645,000 for White River projects including Oliver's Woods.
- Approved a new strategic plan to guide CILTI through 2020.
- Accelerated our stewardship efforts with strategies like our first ever controlled burn at the Nonie Werbe Krauss Preserve and contracting professional staff to successfully control invasive plants amplifying our staff and volunteer work at our Nature Preserves.



# Thank You 2017 Donors

We are pleased to thank the following donors who generously supported conservation right here in Central Indiana with their support of the Central Indiana Land Trust during fiscal year 2017 (January 1 – December 31, 2017).

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*Preserving the Heartland*

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