SHIRLEY HEINZE LAND TRUST TIMELINE

1981-1985 The Early Years

Shirley Heinze Environmental Fund is established in November 1981 with an endowment gift from Robert and Bette Lou Seidner in memory of Dr. Shirley Heinze, who was a strong advocate for the preservation of the Indiana Dunes.

The initial three-person Board of Trustees is organized in 1982 with Ed Osann as the first president.

Early land acquisitions are dune lots in Miller and wetland lots in the Great Marsh in Beverly Shores.


Naturalist Emma Pitcher inaugurates the first "Spring Fling" in 1985. It evolves into an annual program of guided nature hikes.

1986-1995 Laying the Groundwork for the Future

Headquarters office is moved to Barker House in Michigan City in 1986.

Board expansion brings many stalwarts into the organization. Barbara Plampin begins her 18-year tenure on the board in 1986. Bringing impressive botanical expertise, she heads the hike program, offers public lectures, and promotes scientific investigation. Irene Herlocker-Meyer, a local land conservation legend, joins the board in 1986; she will serve until 2002. Myrna Newgent joins in 1988 and serves until 2008. She will be board president for 13 years. Judy Gaskell begins a 14-year stay on the board in 1991.


The Advisory Council is established in 1992.

Land acquisition efforts focus on wetlands in the Great Marsh, dunes in Miller, and dune and swale in Gary. The first transfers of land to Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore are made in 1993.

Peg Mohar becomes executive director in 1994.

The first conservation easements are accepted in 1995.

A generous bequest from Gordon and Faith Greiner in 1995 opens new opportunities for land protection.
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1996-1999  A Time of Unprecedented Growth

Cressmoor Prairie is acquired in 1996; it becomes the first Shirley Heinze property to be dedicated as a state nature preserve.

A nine-acre wetland/woods complex donated by Ralph & Carol Lerner is the first acquisition in LaPorte County. John Merle Coulter Preserve and Seidner Dune & Swale are acquired in 1997; both become dedicated state nature preserves.


Paul Kohlhoff is hired as first full-time Executive Director.

Heinze Fund becomes administrator of the multi-partner Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Wetlands Project, which brings more than $1 million in federal funds for land conservation in Northwest Indiana.

First issue of "Heinze Sights" newsletter is published in 1998, and a website is launched.

Land holdings nearly double in 1999, as more than 300 acres are acquired. Nearly 150 acres of forested wetlands near Michigan City become Ambler Flatwoods Nature Preserve. Yellow Birch Fen is added to Coulter Preserve. Hobart Marsh properties, including Bur Oak Woods and Greiner Preserve, are acquired.

Camp Red Mill, now a LaPorte County Park and dedicated state nature preserve, is saved with Heinze Fund support.

2000-2004  Consolidating Gains


A new phase of Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Wetlands partnership brings another $1 million for acquisition and restoration to the region.

Land Trust Alliance funds preparation of first organizational Strategic Plan.

Renewed emphasis on stewardship as land holdings increase. Jan Hunter is hired as first full-time Stewardship Manager in 2001; Paul Quinlan replaces her in 2002. Major restoration work begun at Ivanhoe South.

Maureen Swed becomes executive director in 2002. Generous bequest by legendary botanist Ray Schulenberg is received.

Reorganization in 2003 brings new name: Shirley Heinze Land Trust, Inc.

More than 50 acres added to Ambler Flatwoods in 2003. Walnut Woods, south of Valparaiso, is accepted as donation from Ralph Siemion in 2004.

First summer benefit in 2004 launches new emphasis on fundraising and community outreach.
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2005-2011 Reaching for New Horizons

Kris Krouse is hired as executive director in 2005.

Land holdings top 1,000 acres with 2006 donation of Barker Woods (a state-dedicated nature preserve), Hildebrand Lake, and Gary Dune Forest from The Nature Conservancy. A 30-acre conservation easement near Valparaiso is donated by Walter Rudzinski.

The Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation provides biggest foundation grant ever in 2007 to fund hiring of development manager. Subsequent Donnelley grants offer critical support for general operations and special projects.


The Little Calumet Wetlands project area, purchased with major support from NiSource, promises to be a haven for paddlers, hikers, and anglers.

New funding sources and partnerships fuel major savanna restoration project at Bur Oak Woods. Volunteer program experiences major growth.

Mighty Acorns education program, in partnership with the Field Museum and Dunes Learning Center, is introduced to Hobart elementary students.

Innovative Green Jobs Program, a partnership with Wildlife Habitat Council and U.S. Forest Service, provides training for laid-off workers in nature preserves.

The Friends of Shirley Heinze initiate the "Bringing Nature Home" awards to encourage the use of native plants by home gardeners and institutional landscapers.

The Great Lakes Innovative Stewardship through Education Network (GLISTEN) offers opportunities for college students to conduct research and take on summer jobs in local nature preserves.

30th Anniversary Celebration in 2011 features many gala events.
Headquarters moves to the former Meadowbrook Girl Scoup Camp near Valparaiso. The new Meadowbrook Nature Preserve and Conservation Center becomes a hub for local land protection and environmental education.

The Northwest Indiana Mighty Acorns Partnership introduces the program to schools in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties, reaching more than 3,000 school children in the 2014-2015 school year.

A flourishing of partnerships engages major business and industry entities (ArcelorMittal, BP, NIPSCO) in local environmental protection.

A joint federal-state project cleans the Grand Calumet River of toxic sediments and adds restored floodplain acreage to Seidner Dune & Swale.

The Indiana Bicentennial Nature Trust helps fund the Meadowbrook acquisition and designates the Little Calumet River Corridor as a priority area for land acquisition.

The Moraine Forest Conservation Planning Project identifies natural land in northern LaPorte and Porter Counties and educates landowners about the importance of conservation.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers undertakes major restoration projects at Ivanhoe South and Little Calumet Wetlands.

Ambler Flatwoods is cited by Chicago Wilderness for excellence in ecological restoration.

A new emphasis on communications and branding results in new logo, updated website, and consistency in publications.

Land holdings approach 1,500 acres with new additions to Meadowbrook, the Little Calumet Wetlands project, Ivanhoe South, and Ambler Flatwoods.

Planning begins for the first capital fundraising campaign.