Building a better nature preserve

City of Gary Facilitates Restoration Project at Ivanhoe South

Turning thirty acres of vacant land in west Gary into Ivanhoe South Nature Preserve has been like putting together a giant jigsaw puzzle. The area was originally platted for single-family housing, and Shirley Heinze Land Trust began acquiring individual lots at tax sales and through donation in the 1980s, gradually expanding the preserve to its present size.

The enclave of rare dune-and-swale topography was little more than an urban dumping ground when we first began acquiring property there. Tons of refuse, including abandoned tires, furniture, and large appliances, were removed in the initial phase of restoration. In recent years we have intensified efforts to establish a healthy savanna/wetland complex there. A number of partners – notably the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, the Legacy Foundation of Lake County, and NiSource – have provided assistance and funding.

While we’ve made much progress, our hopes to transform the property into an extraordinary natural area have been stymied by the existence of rights-of-way which represent unimproved streets and alleyways for the housing originally planned there. When we explained our problem to local officials, the City of Gary came to our rescue. The Common Council, on the recommendation of the Planning Department and with the full support of Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson, adopted an ordinance in September 2012 that vacated those rights-of-way.

The Council’s action has made it possible for Shirley Heinze Land Trust to enter into an agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to undertake a major project at Ivanhoe South under its Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program. Goals of the project are to open up the savanna canopy by clearing opportunistic woody vegetation, maximize infiltration to contribute to better hydrology, remove invasive species, plant native seed specific to the area, and perform controlled burning to allow recovery of the native seed bank. Efforts will also be made to restore habitat for the endangered Karner blue butterfly by planting wild lupine, the sole food source for the rare insect’s larvae.

Shirley Heinze Land Trust is grateful for the support our work at Ivanhoe South has received from Congressman Pete Visclosky and Mayor Freeman-Wilson.

“It has been our pleasure to work with Shirley Heinze Land Trust in moving the Ivanhoe South Nature Preserve project forward,” says Freeman-Wilson. “The transformation of this property will add another element of beauty to our city while preserving the existence of a variety of species and plant life.”

We continue to assemble the pieces that will complete our jigsaw puzzle at Ivanhoe South. With the help of friends and supporters, we are well on the way to turning the property into an impressive biodiversity reserve that provides the local community an educational and recreational asset worthy of pride.

What is Dune & Swale?

Dune-and-swale topography is typified by a series of sandy ridges (dunes) alternating with long narrow wetlands (swales), all running parallel to the Lake Michigan shoreline. Formed within the past 5,000 years as the waters of the great lake receded, the unique landscape supports numerous ecosystems providing a variety of habitats for wildlife. Once common along the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan, dune and swale has been reduced to a few remnants, most of them in the City of Gary. Dune and swale is considered globally rare.
As members of the Legacy Circle, the Wolfes have demonstrated their support by including SHLT in their estate plans. If people like Rob and Charlotte Wolfe are impressed with our achievements, we must be doing something right!

Living Their Beliefs
Rob & Charlotte Wolfe

Lots of people have strong views about environmental protection and sustainability issues. But only a few build their lives around these principles. Rob and Charlotte Wolfe fall in the latter category. They are scientists, educators, farmers, and passionate advocates for a lifestyle that understands and values our connection to the land.

Charlotte, a native Ohioan, and Rob, who grew up in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC, met while doing graduate work at the Center for Wetlands at the University of Florida. Their journey to Indiana began when Charlotte decided in 1990 to earn a PhD in environmental science at IU Bloomington under Dr. Dan Willard. Guided by staff at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, she was awarded a grant to work on the restoration of the Great Marsh. While on one of her daily excursions in the wilds of the Dunes, Charlotte met Barbara Plampin and Myrna Newgent. The two women became her mentors and friends; they introduced her to the work of Shirley Heinze Land Trust.

Meanwhile, Rob accepted a position with the environmental restoration and consulting firm, JF New & Associates, based in Walkerton in southern St. Joseph County. That was twenty-three years ago, and Rob is currently Vice President and Senior Principal. The firm, now called Cardno JFNew, has grown from three employees to over 170 during those years.

The Wolfes purchased 85 acres of agricultural land in 1992 near Lakeville, with the intent of restoring half of it to prairie and wetlands and using the other half for sustainable agriculture, raising a variety of crops and heritage livestock breeds. It was a perfect place to raise their daughter Robin, now a teenager, and teach her the values that are important to them.

The property has evolved into Prairie Winds Nature Farm, a thriving educational and agricultural concern for which Charlotte has been the driving force. “I handle the wildlife half of the operation,” says Rob. “Charlotte does the farming.”

More than 3,500 adults and children of all ages visit the farm each year to learn where food really comes from, meet the farm animals, and hike in the restored natural areas. Several schools and daycares include a weekly visit as part of their curriculum throughout the year, and the farm day camp is popular with many area families. The Wolfes raise much of their own food here and share their bounty with subscribers in a small community-supported agriculture program.

Rob and Charlotte have been supporters of Shirley Heinze Land Trust for many years. “I think the work that Shirley Heinze does is critical in making sure that the ecological gems of Northwest Indiana are preserved.” Rob says. “They do an excellent job of managing their properties for the future. That’s what makes them special.”

“As ecologists, we value diversity in our natural areas just as we do in our farming and livestock interests,” Charlotte adds. “It’s important to protect diversity both for our present enjoyment and to meet future needs as yet unknown.”

Under terms of the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012, individuals are permitted to roll over up to $100,000 from an individual retirement account (IRA) directly to a qualifying charity without recognizing the assets transferred as income. This opportunity is valid only until December 31, 2013.

Consult with your attorney or financial planner for advice on how you can take advantage of this opportunity before it’s too late.

IRA Charitable Rollover Opportunity Expires at End of Year

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Moraine Forest Conservation Planning Project

Landowner workshops conclude second phase of initiative

The Moraine Forest Conservation Planning Project, a trailblazing effort to partner local land preservation entities in a joint regional approach to natural land conservation, concluded its second phase with a series of workshops for landowners in eight designated core areas during April and May. Brochures and maps specific to each area were produced and mailed to landowners prior to the workshops.

Representatives of partner organizations met with workshop participants to explain the benefits of land conservation, outline options for them to consider, and describe the goals of the project. Guided hikes were also provided, as well as other activities, such as tree planting exercises and invasive species identification.

The Moraine Forest Project was initiated in 2009. An intensive survey of natural land within the southern Lake Michigan watershed was conducted during the first phase. The data thus produced were used to prepare a map which identified already protected areas and ranked unprotected parcels according to their conservation value. The map is a resource for land trusts and government agencies to guide their acquisition efforts. It has also been incorporated into the long-range plans of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission.

The Moraine Project followed an earlier initiative by Shirley Heinze Land Trust to guide its acquisition of boreal flatwoods properties around Ambler Flatwoods Nature Preserve in LaPorte County. Since the implementation of that effort, more than 150 additional acres of land have been protected, increasing that preserve’s size by forty percent.

“The Moraine Forest Conservation Planning Project has been a great success,” says SHLT Executive Director Kris Krouse. “It has promoted cooperation among many groups and helped us all to focus on how best to achieve our common goals. We’re already starting to see some progress in acquiring new land for protection, and I’m confident there will be much more.”

Benefits of Land Conservation in the Moraine Forest

BETTER WATER QUALITY
The forest filters pollutants and slows stormwater. It helps replenish groundwater.

BETTER AIR QUALITY
The forest removes airborne pollutants and provides general cooling during periods of intense heat.

OUTDOOR RECREATION
The forest offers many places to explore and enjoy.

A STRONGER LOCAL ECONOMY
The forest makes our region a place where people want to visit and live.

UNIQUE HABITAT
The forest is an important component of the Great Lakes basin’s most biodiverse region.
Making the most of Meadowbrook

Since moving our headquarters to the new Meadowbrook Conservation Center & Nature Preserve, the property has been buzzing with activity as we begin restoration work, develop it into an educational and recreational resource, and introduce it to the public. Many have helped. Our foundation supporters have provided generous grants. Merchants, such as Riggs Mowers of Valparaiso, have offered discounts and donations. Dozens of individuals have given their time and labor.

Executive Director Kris Krouse greets visitors at the July 20 Community Hike.

Cami Santner & Gracie Delahunty of Girl Scout Troop 127 work on trail maintenance.

Hatchlings in one of 12 bluebird boxes built and installed by volunteer Mike Nieckula.

Life board member Myrna Newgent leads a hike for some neighbors.

Interns Rick Dorton (IU Northwest) and Jason Lundquist (Ivy Tech Gary) spent the summer on various stewardship tasks.
A new feature greeting visitors to Meadowbrook Conservation Center is a native-plant garden just outside the headquarters building. Friends of Shirley Heinze (FOSH) installed the plantings in June, with the assistance of SHLT staff and a number of volunteers. Peg Mohar, Myrna Newgent, Henry Jones, Karen Quinlan, Laura Henderson, and Warren Buckler served on the committee organizing the effort.

The 1,200-square-feet garden’s design is intended to highlight local flora which thrive in native landscaping. Three hundred twenty-five plants were used, representing thirty-nine species. The garden will be managed over the years to keep loose groupings of plants together rather than let it go wild. (Aggressive species will be contained, the less vigorous aided.) Something should be in bloom throughout the growing season from May through October.

FOSH also sponsors the annual Bringing Nature Home awards program, which recognizes local home gardeners and institutional landscapers who design their plantings using native species.

Meadowbrook Botany Blitz

An impressive 165 native plant species were found by volunteers and staff during a Botany Blitz at the newly acquired Meadowbrook Nature Preserve on June 30. The number of natives identified for the site now totals 187. They include three state-listed species and sixteen plants considered very rare in the Chicago region (a 9 or 10 rating, according to Swink and Wilhelm). The property’s native floristic quality assessment (FQA) rating, according to these initial findings, is 63.9.

More than twenty people participated in the exercise. They walked the property in two groups led by professional botanists Scott Namestnik and Abigail Lima, both from the ecological consulting and restoration firm, Cardno JF New. The teams spent three hours surveying the 74-acre site’s southern portion, which includes a steep ravine and riparian area that has seen very little disturbance historically. A few sections of older second-growth woods were also investigated.
News from the Field

Water Sampling at Meadowbrook Nature Preserve

Valparaiso University biology students, under the direction of Professor Laurie Eberhardt, collected water-quality data from the stream flowing through the ravine at Meadowbrook. The exercise, conducted in April, was part of an Openlands-sponsored project sampling the headwaters of waterways in the southern Lake Michigan watershed.

The student scientists identified eleven macroinvertebrates, including insect larvae, snails, crayfish, and aquatic worms. Also found were seven species of fish. Many of the organisms are typically intolerant of degraded conditions, suggesting a good pollution tolerance rating for the stream.

Valpo students have also been monitoring deer browse at the property.

Sustain Our Great Lakes Grant

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has awarded $30,000 of Sustain Our Great Lakes funds to control invasive species, restore native riparian canopy cover, and reforest surrounding uplands on 60 acres of habitat at Meadowbrook Nature Preserve. Our project was the only one in Indiana selected for funding this year.

Sustain Our Great Lakes is a unique public-private funding partnership bringing together a number of federal government agencies and ArcelorMittal Steel Company to support environmental enhancement in the Great Lakes region.

In Memoriam

Maureen O’Donnell Swed (1953-2013)

We are saddened to report the death of Maureen O’Donnell Swed. She was Executive Director of Shirley Heinze Land Trust from 2002 to 2004. Maureen presided over a major organizational transition: our restructuring from a charitable trust to a non-profit corporation. During her tenure, we acquired important additions to Ambler Flatwoods and Ivanhoe South. She organized the first summer benefit, which has evolved into our primary annual fundraiser. Maureen and her family traveled around the country to the various National Park Service postings held by her husband of thirty years, J.D. Swed. She lived most recently in Bozeman, Montana, where her two daughters and their families reside.

Army Corps Project at Little Calumet Wetlands

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has begun work on a restoration project at Little Calumet Wetlands in Chesterton. Under an agreement signed last August, the Little Calumet River Riparian Great Lakes Fishery & Ecosystem Restoration Project will improve water quality and wildlife diversity by restoring wetland and woodland habitats and eliminating invasive species.

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Putting our best face forward  
*Communications Committee updates Heinze image*

The Communications Committee, one of the newest standing committees of the Board of Directors, has been assigned an important task. It’s working to refresh our image and present a clear, consistent, recognizable brand for public consumption.

An early achievement was the preparation last year of a Communications and Marketing Plan to guide the committee’s work. “Our initial focus has been on external communications,” says committee chair Jonathan Hildebrand. “We’re excited about the new look we’re presenting.”

SHLT adopted this year a revised logo – designed by artist and committee member Barb Labus – which now features on all our publications and new signage. “Our goal,” says Hildebrand, “was to retain the spirit of the fern we had used previously, while reinvigorating it to enhance its appeal to our growing list of supporters.”

Other changes include an updated, more user-friendly website and increased emphasis on social media. A new brochure has been developed, and informational signage and interpretive trail markers, using a consistent format, are being produced and installed in our nature preserves. New trail maps are also in the works.

“The press plays an important role in our efforts to get the word out about Shirley Heinze,” Hildebrand notes. “Our move to the former Meadowbrook Girl Scout Camp has received a great deal of coverage in the media. Those articles have generated terrific interest.” Volunteers have come to help us get our new house in order. Local merchants have been generous with donations and price reductions. New partnerships within the community have been developed.

“Shirley Heinze Land Trust has a very good public image,” concludes Hildebrand. ‘We need to build on that positive perception to grow our support and ensure that we will always be able to fulfill our important mission. I think we’re off to a great start!”

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**Breaking News**

**Porter County Community Foundation Grant**

Shirley Heinze Land Trust was awarded a $20,000 grant by the Porter County Community Foundation (PCCF) in support of our efforts to acquire, restore, and develop the educational and recreational possibilities of the former girl scout camp which became our home earlier this year.

“We are fortunate to have local organizations such as Shirley Heinze that have the foresight to protect environmentally significant land for future generations,” says PCCF President Barb Young. “We are proud to be able to help fund and support their effort to preserve this natural resource, and we are grateful to our donors who enable us to invest in our community.”

**Calumet Summit**

Shirley Heinze Land Trust was a leading sponsor of “2013 Calumet Summit: Connecting for Action.” The event, held May 14-15 at the Marquette Park Pavilion in Gary, brought together environmental professionals, scientists, regional planners, and government entities from both sides of the Illinois-Indiana border to discuss ways to address issues of concern for the broader Calumet Region. Among the speakers were U.S. Representative Pete Visclosky and Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson.

SHLT has been involved in this initiative since it was first conceived (the initial summit was in 2010). We continue to demonstrate our commitment to regional collaboration through our participation in such groups as the Chicago Wilderness consortium and the Calumet Stewardship Initiative and through our partnerships with Chicago-based organizations like The Field Museum and Alliance for the Great Lakes.

**Landau and NiSource Offer Foundation Support**

The Louise H. Landau Foundation awarded a $50,000 grant for our Ambler project. The Chicago-based organization has been a financial supporter since 2008. Also providing support for the project was the NiSource Charitable Foundation, which gave $25,000. Our partnership with NiSource (and NIPSCO) spans more than twenty years and involves numerous projects for our land-acquisition, restoration, and educational programs.

**Rick Soria is Newest Board Member**

Rick Soria of Valparaiso was elected to the Board of Directors at its July 2013 meeting. Rick is Vice Chancellor of the Michigan City campus of Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana. He is very active in community affairs and has served on numerous other boards covering a wide variety of issues, including education, health, the arts, transportation, and social welfare.
SETTING A HIGH BAR

Board members of non-profits set the course for their organization by making the decisions necessary to advance its mission. They contribute – according to their circumstances and capabilities – varying amounts of time, money, and expertise. They receive no compensation. They are volunteers who serve solely because they are committed to the cause.

Shirley Heinze Land Trust's board members (there are currently fourteen) serve three-year terms; many are re-elected to a second term after conclusion of the first. They attend bi-monthly board meetings and have serious responsibilities, including the approval of the annual budget, strategic plan, and land acquisitions. They generally also serve on at least two standing committees (land strategy, stewardship, education, communications, board development, finance, fundraising, and building & grounds). The committees meet several times a year to address those specific issues.

A board member’s work entails more than just attending meetings. Our members also contribute a phenomenal amount of additional volunteer time - well over a thousand hours so far this year on a variety of projects: moving to our new office location, organizing outreach and fundraising events, advancing communications goals, providing legal expertise, etc. They also have been generous in their financial donations, giving more than $50,000 this year to date.

When a board member's tenure concludes, he or she doesn’t just disappear. Our life board members (Myrna Newgent, Barbara Plampin, Irene Herlocker-Meyer, and Judith Gaskell) have been off the board for several years, but they contribute just as much time and financial resources as voting members. Other past board members stay active through the Advisory Council, a group of professionals who offer expertise and advice, or the Friends of Shirley Heinze, volunteers who work on special projects like the Bringing Nature Home Awards Program. Many also retain membership on the standing committees.

I am privileged to work daily with board members, past and present, who go above and beyond the call of duty to support Shirley Heinze Land Trust. Their commitment is a major reason for the success we have achieved in fulfilling our mission.

Our future depends on our ability to recruit, on a continuing basis, skilled and committed people for board membership. If you think you might have an interest in joining us, please let me know. Or discuss the possibility with a current or past board member. Don’t be intimidated by the responsibilities that come with board membership. The rewards are well worth the effort!

Sincerely,
Kris Krouse