

NORTH OAKLAND HEADWATERS LAND CONSERVANCY



2015 Annual Report



The North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy (NOHLC) is a private, non-profit, donor supported organization with 43 years of experience in preserving open space in northwest Oakland County. Over 1,500 acres have been preserved, with parcels ranging from 1/2 acre to over 250 acres.

NOHLC's mission is to conserve the woods, fields, streams and other natural resources in the headwaters area of the Clinton, Shiawassee, Flint and Huron rivers.

Table of Contents

<i>Table of Contents</i>	2
In Recognition of Chris Benedict’s Service.....	3
Board of Directors and Staff.....	5
Summary of 2015 Activities.....	6
Emphasis on Stewardship.....	6
Building a Multi-talented Staff.....	6
Hiring an Executive Director.....	6
Land Acquisition.....	7
Collaboration in the Huron River Watershed.....	7
Collaboration Under the CISMA Umbrella.....	7
Continuity of Our Mission.....	7
Financial Status of Conservancy.....	8
List of all Properties and Interest in Properties.....	9
Nature and Purpose of all Leases	10

In Recognition of Chris Benedict's Service as President of NOHLC: Thomas K. Bullen Achievement Award 2015



In 2008, Chris Benedict's employer offered him the opportunity to go back to school during the economic downturn. Benedict had worked in the auto industry for 15 years, and his first thought was to study a field that would provide the most financial stability for his family, regardless if it was something he was passionate about. It was his wife who sat him down and encouraged him to do something he cared about and to embrace this opportunity as a second chance to do work that was meaningful to him. Having always loved being out in nature, Benedict started to explore programs and career options that would allow him to be monetarily solvent but also enjoy his job.

Growing up, Benedict had enjoyed playing in the fields and forests near his home in Troy, and he was saddened to see them destroyed by land development. It was this experience that led him to attain his graduate degree in public administration, with hopes of applying it in environmental conservancy—an opportunity that would later present itself through tangential connection to the organization he now represents.

Today, Benedict is at the helm of North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy (NOHLC), an organization located in Clarkston that preserves natural resources in the headwaters areas of the Clinton, Shiawassee, Huron, and Flint Rivers and encompasses about 1,400 acres in six townships and two counties.

To use Benedict's words, "Responsible development is the key to our community's long-term sustainability. Protecting ecologically sensitive land not only helps maintain the beautiful rural aesthetics that draw so many to North Oakland County, but also ensures that our children and grandchildren will continue to enjoy our area's most valuable natural resource—water."

NOHLC was first known as the Independence Township Land Trust. The organization was formed in 1972 and received nonprofit status to "acquire land or scenic easements through gifts or purchase so that they could be left in their natural state" and to "use all property controlled by the Conservancy exclusively for the benefit of all inhabitants of Independence Township." Three years later, Independence became the first conservancy to purchase land in Michigan, and, in 1977, was awarded

the Michigan State Resolution No. 24 to commend its acquisition and preservation of the Township's land.

Throughout the next 20 years, the Conservancy assumed a more active role in purchasing land, expanding in 1996 thanks to a partnership with the Springfield Township Land Conservancy. It was shortly after this merger that the organization became the North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy. Now, another 20 years later, it has interest in just over 1,500 acres –a total of 58 properties, 19 of which are owned by NOHLC. The remaining properties are protected through conservancy easements filed with Oakland County.

As conservancy efforts have increased over the last four decades, so too has our understanding of all that successful preservation entails. In the 1970s and 80s it seemed to be as easy as putting a fence around a charted area for it to be considered “safe.” That’s not the case anymore, however, with the rise of invasive non-native plant species and the active management required to stave off their growth and proliferation. Additional challenges range from awareness of non-profit efforts like NOHLC to financial support.

According to Charity Navigator, by the end of 2014, \$358.38 billion had been donated to organizations around the county, of which \$10.5 billion, or 3 percent, was contributed to environmental causes. Less than 5 percent of that was contributed to land conservancies.

There is also a logistical problem. Properties owned or maintained by NOHLC are not always amenable for use as public walkways, so people don’t get to see the beauty of the land that is being protected. Regardless, members of the 12-person board and the 30 to 40 active volunteers engaged with NOHLC tout the benefits of the conservancy, which protects the signature character of the Michigan woods, streams, fields, and wetlands and leads the conservation of how we, as citizens, can go about development in a way that is in harmony with nature.

Benedict stressed his gratitude for all who have volunteered with NOHLC, citing the inspiration he feels after examining their dedicated work and investment in the organization. NOHLC hosts a variety of events for people interested in land conservancy or those looking to learn more. These include hosting an open committee meeting every first Monday of the month for the public to discuss the care of NOHLC properties and current topics in conservation. NOHLC also offers guided walks through accessible conservancy projects for those who enjoy hiking. In addition, they hold an annual fundraising event, typically held in October, which in the past has included a live auction and the chance to purchase luxurious vacation trips around the country, all in support of this remarkable organization.

I encourage you to visit the NOHLC website, which contains a wealth of information about how to get involved in land conservancy. It includes easy tips on how to preserve your own land and avoid encroachment by invasive species as well as a glossary of terms with which concerned homeowners and nature buffs should become familiar. We all, individually and collectively, can do so much in support of organizations like NOHLC and land preservation as a whole throughout the great state of Michigan.

This article written by Nicolette Chambery first appeared in the “Building Community” section of Michigan Home and Lifestyle under the title, “North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy: Championing the Cause of Land Conservation One Acre at a Time.” For more information visit www.nohlc.org

NOHLC BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND STAFF

2015	2016
<p><u>Board President</u> Christopher Benedict</p>	<p><u>Board President</u> Emily Duthinh</p>
<p><u>Secretary</u> Emily Duthinh</p>	<p><u>Vice President</u> Jean Gramlich</p>
<p><u>Treasurer</u> Marilyn Zigarac</p>	<p><u>Secretary</u> Bette Moen</p>
<p><u>Past President</u> Kirk Falvai</p>	<p><u>Treasurer</u> Marilyn Zigarac</p>
<p><u>Directors</u> Mike Dougherty Sharon Gardner Jean Gramlich Susan Julian Greg Kazmierski Bette Moen Paul Rabaut</p>	<p><u>Past President</u> Christopher Benedict</p>
<p><u>Performance Auditors</u> Mary Blanchard Sue Topping</p>	<p><u>Directors</u> Basia Dabrowski Mike Dougherty Sharon Gardner Robert Inskip Susan Julian Greg Kazmierski</p>
<p><u>Staff</u> Katie Chumack (6 months) Casey Foote (9 months) Mary Herzenstiel (10 months) Jan Kolodge (5 months)</p>	<p><u>Performance Auditors</u> Mary Blanchard Sue Topping</p>
<p><u>Volunteers</u> Too many to list</p>	<p><u>Staff</u> Mary Herzenstiel Shannon Steel</p>
<p><u>Volunteers</u> Too many to list</p>	<p><u>Volunteers</u> Too many to list</p>

Summary of 2015 Activities

1. Emphasis on Stewardship. On the recommendation of the Stewardship Committee, the NOHLC Board voted to spend more than the usual expenditures for stewardship in 2015 and built that cost into its budget. Normally the conservancy expends no more than 10% of its restricted funds, but the need to protect the conservation values of its easements and holdings had been growing for the past decade. Better definition of boundaries, signage identifying preserves, invasive plant removal, and actions where neighbors had encroached were some of the crying needs. Throughout the year, volunteers and contract workers attacked the problems, and made substantial progress. The work had the unexpected benefit of rekindling good relationships with neighbors, as in Robert Frost's observation that good fences make good neighbors.

2. Building a Multi-talented Staff. For years, NOHLC had relied on volunteers and limited staff to advance its mission. It was time to build a staff to close the gaps. Katie Chumack, a forestry graduate, moved into the position of Administrative Assistant, enabling the conservancy to reach out through events and social media. Unfortunately for NOHLC, she left in June to pursue a new career as a veterinarian. Before she left she moved the conservancy into the realm of twenty-first century social media. Casey Foote advanced her hours to become a communications/development coordinator and helped lay out a strategic fundraising program. Mary Herzenstiel also worked part time, focusing on data base improvement, and Sheri Trout continued as our contractor for the all important bookkeeping services. With the aid of Sue Julian as Interim Executive Director, the conservancy was ready to advance to the next step of hiring a full-time, fully supported ED.

3. Hiring an Executive Director with Fundraising Expertise. The Board formed a committee to interview candidates for the position. The conservancy raised and set aside funds to match a grant from The Carls Foundation to take this pivotal step. After a thorough and extensive search, the seemingly best candidate was selected within the salary available. Following an evaluation period, it was determined in November that the candidate did not meet our needs. Members of the Board volunteered to step in and fill the void. Bob Inskeep and Sue Julian assumed coordination of everyday affairs, Chris Benedict handled transition issues, individual Board members assisted with office functions and, by the end of the year, Mary Herzenstiel returned and a talented, new intern in the person of Shannon Steel was on the job. In 2016, the Board will revisit the need for leadership in both administration and fundraising.

4. Land Acquisition. Using the guidance of NOHLC's adopted 10,000 acre challenge to preserve important parcels of land in our headwaters region, several acquisitions were pursued

throughout the year. Thirty-five acres of wetland and open water at the northernmost extent of Kearsley Creek, a trout stream, was a finalized donation from the Charles McGrath estate. Its proximity to Oakwood Elementary may lead to collaboration in science and outdoor hands on activities for Brandon school children. The other acquisition, Sashabaw Creek, just missed the December deadline and will have to be counted in 2016 as twenty acres of added land. As is the case with many land donations, the complications lead to years of negotiation, in this case because it involved MDEQ approval of a mitigation agreement and promise to restore land next to a pristine river that was damaged years before by golf course development. NOHLC also responded to the challenge of an endangered butterfly in the Shiawassee River corridor by opening challenging discussions with neighbors who owned fen wetland that may be one of the last reserves for *Powesheik* skipperling in the United States.

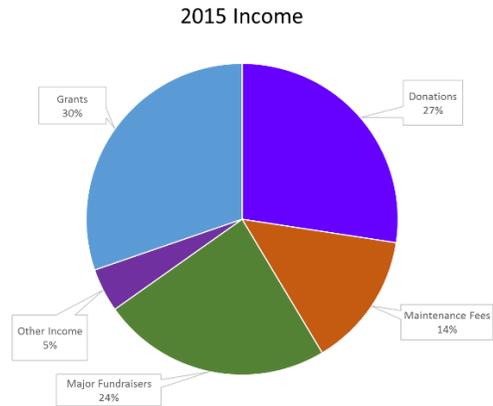
5. Collaboration in the Huron River Watershed. NOHLC continued its participation in the SEMIWild collaboration of nine conservancies focused at this time on preserving collectively 500 acres that maintain the clarity, cleanliness and functioning of the Huron River. A partner in this effort is the Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC). NOHLC identified over 30 properties that met HRWC and NOHLC criteria and began contact with homeowners at the uppermost region of the watershed. Completion of this work is expected in 2016 with outreach funding provided by The Carls Foundation.

6. Collaboration under the CISMA umbrella. Despite the rejection of a grant to MDNR, this conservancy and thirteen other partners went ahead with a program of invasive plant control with emphasis on *Phragmites*. A CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) was formed. The Road Commission of Oakland County provided funding pro-rated by miles of the infestation of the non-native, 10-15 foot reed along roadsides. NOHLC partnered with Rose Township who supplied an additional \$5000 for the invasive removal. Independence Twp worked on NOHLC land as part of its collaboration. Sites were mapped, GPSed, sprayed or cut and dabbed, and various outreach educational materials were developed, which appear on NOHLC's website. 2016 will be a year of follow-up to see how much control was achieved. NOHLC hopes to introduce the idea of replanting with native species and will continue its partnership in the Oakland County CISMA.

7. Continuity of Action for our Mission. Staffing changes did not deter the Board from its mission-based planning. The Flint Water Crisis, seen from the perspective on developments in the latter part of 2015 and into 2016 have proven the importance of long-term thinking and citizen action with respect to the natural resources that we enjoy and must not defile in our lifetime. The so-called Seventh Generation thinking embodied in the Great Law of the Iroquois is a much a cultural mandate as it has ever been, and our actions today still spring from our duty to regard what we do today with an eye to the future.

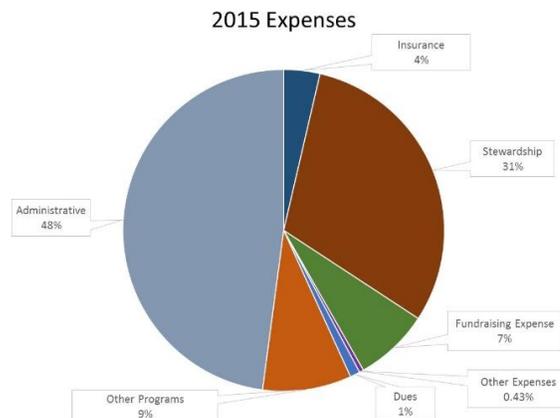
Financial Status of Conservancy

In 2015 the income received from donations and major fundraisers as a percentage of total income was down slightly from 2014. Raising funds to support areas outside of normal operations such as land acquisition, and additional stewardship activities continues to represent a significant challenge for the organization.



Not included in the income chart above was the much appreciated donation of 35 acres at Mud Lake, valued at the time of donation at \$71,800. Also not listed is the value of the thousands of hours of volunteer time and in-kind donations of services that the organization relies upon. NOHLC is very grateful to all of you for providing this assistance to support NOHLC's mission.

Administrative expense as a percentage of total expense was consistent with previous years. In 2015 NOHLC was able to increase the emphasis on preserve stewardship and reduce fundraising expense as a percentage of total expense. NOHLC continues to focus on expense management and will continue to work efficiently as possible. If the dollar value of volunteer hours were included as part of the total expense, the administrative expense as a percentage of total expense would be significantly reduced.



LIST OF ALL PROPERTIES AND INTEREST IN PROPERTIES

1. Waterford Hills
2. Cedar Park I
3. Schmude Sanctuary
4. Poquosin I
5. Poquosin II
6. Steeple Ridge
7. Old Sturbridge
8. Whipple Tree Lane
9. Nolta-Brennan
10. Kimball Sanctuary
11. Keller Sanctuary
12. Cranberry Lake
13. Robert Shell Fen
14. Oakhill Hollow
15. Deerwood Hollow
16. Village Park
17. Heather Haven
18. Round Lake Shores
19. Voorheis-Beardsley
20. Bridge Valley Reserve
21. Oakland Hill I
22. Cedar Park II
23. Springfield Nature Preserve
24. Suzanne G. Knorr Preserve
25. Bald Eagle Lake
26. Pine Knob Country Estates
27. Schwartz Easement
28. Haddon Nursery
29. Oakland Crest I
30. Bailey Preserve
31. Hummingbird Ridge
32. Whipple Lake
33. Liberty Golf Easement
34. Thomson Preserve
35. Hidden Ridge
36. Ingomar Farms
37. Victoria Preserve
38. Dixie Preserve
39. Princeton Preserve
40. Rattalee Shores
41. Forest Pointe
42. Clarkston Woods
43. Davis Lake Overlook
44. Eaton Hanging Fen
45. Holly Lakeview
46. Oakland Crest II
47. Campbell Easement
48. Waterworks Wetlands
49. Tully Lake
50. Long Lake Village
51. Oakland Hill II
52. Gill Landing
53. Thread Creek Farm
54. Hall's Connector
55. Camp Wathana
56. Buckhorn Complex
57. Mud Lake Preserve

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF LEASES

NOHLC has not leased any of its property or property interests in its 43 year existence.

NOHLC does sublet the office within its leased office space at the Deer Lake Center. The office is sublet to the Oakland Conservation District.



Sashabaw Creek in Early Summer—Ours to Protect