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The Raisin Valley Land Trust is a non-profit organization established to use all reasonable means to preserve, enhance, and maintain the natural, historical and cultural qualities that define the Raisin valley.

Letter from the president

Happy New Year to all our supporters!

I would like to start our 20th year by thanking you for your continued interest in and support of the Raisin Valley Land Trust. Grassroots conservation has never been easy, but it has also never been more important than it is today. In this issue, you will find many examples of how RVLТ continues to reinvent and define ourselves in ways that will provide the greatest benefit to the people, land and water in the River Raisin watershed.

In this first issue of our redesigned newsletter, you will find an article on the strategic plan that outlines how we seek to better serve some of the underrepresented communities, like those in the Goose Creek watershed, while we continue to expand our efforts to seek public resources for our work across the watershed through programs like the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, and the 319 funding.

One of our accomplishments that we are most proud of is the partnerships we have made with other

state and local non-profit groups, and the common ground we have found with all types of citizens, businesses and municipalities. We are all connected by the river and dependent on it for any number of social, recreational, economic or aesthetic values. Some enjoy the Irish Hills, or days at the lake; while others enjoy fishing or canoeing on the river, or driving past the historic farms. For me, all of the above make this the place I choose to live, and I believe we all need to rally around the River to ensure that these charms exist for generations to come.

We enter our third decade hopeful about the future of RVLТ. Our financial and strategic plans will put us on a path to sustainability, and should insure that our conservation efforts stand the test of time. We call on each and every friend, member, donor and volunteer to join us, and ask that you seize on the spirit of grassroots conservation and help us to succeed in carrying out our vision.

— Jennifer Bruggeman, president of the board

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The results are in! from the MDEQ-grant survey

More than 80 percent of all respondents to a recent survey agree or strongly agree that it is their responsibility to help protect water quality, and that the quality of life in their community depends on good water quality in local streams, rivers and lakes. That is one of the findings of a recently completed survey of land owners living in the upper portions of the River Raisin watershed, known as the headwaters of the river.

The Raisin headwaters are defined by the highest elevations in the watershed – 196 square miles that make up nearly 20 percent of the entire watershed. This zone spans an area from Somerset Center in Hillsdale County, to just upstream of Clinton, including the towns of Cement City, Brooklyn, Napoleon, Norvell and Manchester. By starting this project in the headwaters, these efforts can be carried downstream, where it is just as important that parts of our natural heritage are maintained and restored. This same area is the focus of a 319 nonpoint source management grant received by the five conservation organizations comprising the River Raisin Partnership. The grant was awarded by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality for the

purpose of improving water quality in the upper River Raisin watershed.

The first task of the grant was the survey, which was designed to evaluate the current level of awareness of residents about the conditions of the Raisin, as well as the threats and opportunities that it faces. A follow-up survey will be done at the end of the project to gauge the success of the grant in raising awareness.

Survey results are being used to design two programs, which will be initiated in March 2012 and continue into 2013. One of these will inform landowners about options for permanently protecting important habitat in the upper River Raisin watershed. The other will bring a series of land stewardship workshops that will help landowners learn land restoration practices and how they can improve wildlife habitat and water quality. Residents outside of the focus area are welcome to participate, as the information presented is relevant throughout southeast Michigan.

The survey was targeted toward people who own 10 or more acres, so it confirms that landowners – the people in the best position to take action – recognize that they play an important role in the quality of the Raisin and its tributaries.

A significant number of respondents are already doing forest management, wetland or habitat restoration on their property (16-21 percent) and about 15 percent more are interested in trying one of those practices. Even more, 41 percent, have an interest in permanently protecting their land.

The RVLТ and the other partners to the grant, the Legacy Land Conservancy, the Stewardship Network, YMCA Storer Camps, and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation, are heartened by these results, and look forward to meeting many more residents of the upper River Raisin watershed this spring (see “Dates announced” on page 8).

Additional publicity and mailings will begin in February, and you can check our website for details on dates and locations.

— Sybil Kolon

MIS supports RVLТ and the 319 grant

On December 7th, board members Sybil Kolon and Woody Kellum attended a ceremony to receive a generous gift of \$3,003 from Michigan International Speedway (MIS) on behalf of RVLТ. The award will help provide private match dollars for our 319 grant, and will support our efforts to seek conservation easements of important lands in the Goose Creek sub-watershed of the River Raisin. RVLТ is expanding our efforts in the Goose Creek area to reach new constituency and protect the source of the river, among other things (see “Our path forward” on page 6 of this newsletter). We thank MIS for their contributions, and hope that this will be the first step in a lasting relationship, and that their leadership may inspire other area businesses to step up and help RVLТ in “Savin’ the Raisin.”

Welcome Steve Woods, RVLt's newest board member

A Michigan native and lifelong resident, Steve Woods grew up in Saginaw before attending college at Lake Superior State University in the Upper Peninsula, where he majored in Environmental Science and minored in Chemistry. Steve then earned a Master of Science in Environmental Forest Biology with a specialization in Plant Ecology from the State University of New York in Syracuse. His professional career consists of a 1-year stint with the USDA Forest Service before going to work for The Nature Conservancy in Michigan.

He spent 8 years managing restoration projects across Eastern Michigan, where he became intimately familiar with the partners and landscape of the River Raisin watershed. He now works for the Ohio Chapter of The Nature Conservancy as the Oak Openings Project Director, where he oversees all aspects of strategic planning, partnership building, fundraising, operations and land management in an effort to protect this important landscape.

This recent professional move allowed Steve to become more involved with RVLt, and work in the River Raisin landscape. He hopes to help build the capacity of RVLt by aiding in strategic planning, grant writing and by sharing his knowledge of the local ecology.

Steve lives in Clarklake, Michigan with his wife Brenda, their toddler Wyatt, and their two dogs Spirit and Lucy.



Words of others

“Water is a treasure Michigan shares with seven other states and with Canadian friends who also share with us one of the longest peaceful international borders in the world. While we must lead in protecting water, we also must consult and call on our friends to join us in protecting it.”

— The Waters of Michigan,
David Lubbers and Dave Dempsey



Image from The Waters of Michigan
(photo by David Lubbers)

RVLt information

126 E. Church Street, Adrian, Michigan 49221
(517) 264-6178 • rvlt.org • info@rvlt.org

RVLt board meetings are generally held at 7:30 pm on the first Wednesday of each month at our office; please email or call for more information.

Officers and directors

Jennifer Bruggeman	president
Sybil Kolon	vice-president
John Stahly	treasurer
Woody Kellum	secretary
Jim Leslie	director
Steve Woods	director

A look back at the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

The New Year brings with it both the occasion to look ahead, and the opportunity to take stock of the past. As we begin 2012, we can celebrate the completion of RVLТ's collaboration with Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Final payments and paperwork were recently completed, bringing a close to this 5 year project that helped RVLТ build conservation in the watershed.

Sponsored by the US Department of Agriculture, CREP promotes the protection of environmentally sensitive land, decreased erosion, the restoration of wildlife habitat, and measures to safeguard ground and surface water (see "More about conservation easements and CREP," page 5). After initiating the process in 2000, RVLТ's first foray into working with this program on the River Raisin began in the spring of 2006, with an easement on the old Hoffman farm.

Reducing sediment runoff, deterring flooding and reverting to a more natural state: these are a few of the benefits that can stem from establishing conservation easements through CREP. The easement on 30 acres of the Hoffman farm, owned by Don and Brenda Dheel, ensured that each of these benefits was realized. With the farmland in the floodplain converted to perennial grasses, this easement represents another step towards restoring and improving the well-being of the River Raisin. While floodplains often contain fertile soil, farming in these areas leads to huge quantities of sediment and nutrients entering

the river and ultimately Lake Erie. Spring floods are common on the River, and farm fields typically have bare soil that is easily swept away. Once in the river, sediment degrades fish spawning habitat and chokes out native mussel beds, while nutrients lead to algal blooms that create "dead zones" in the Lake.

In the winter of 2007, another 43 acres on the River Raisin were added to RVLТ's CREP portfolio, with a conservation easement in Lenawee County's Palmyra Township. This property was especially appealing due to its two distinct land uses, a 27-acre former agricultural field and a 16-acre woodlot.

Although owner Geraldine Drefke once leased all her fields to a local farmer, she enrolled the 27-acre field closest to the river in the CREP program after learning of its eligibility; in 2001, it was planted with perennial grasses. In an area where first plantings were once occasionally washed away by river flooding, the soil is now stabilized, and sediments and fertilizer run-off is reduced. As a result of this transformation, many species of insects, birds and mammals now find homes in the grassy meadow bordered by the woods on the bank of the river.

Drefke's 16-acre woods saw logging in the past, and although selective logging is still allowed, any logging must now be performed in a manner that protects the conservation values of the property and the water quality of the River Raisin. The property has a diverse array of tree species indicative of a southern floodplain forest, including American elm, basswood, black and red ash, black walnut, bur oak, eastern cottonwood, and sycamore. The woodlands also have a diversity of plants found in a floodplain forest, including Beak Grass, listed as a threatened species by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory.

As it turned out, 2007 was a banner year for RVLТ and the CREP program, as RVLТ accepted two more easements, one which was an extension of the 2006 easement. As a result of these acquisitions, RVLТ holds easements on three parcels, with 1.5 miles of frontage on the banks of the River Raisin in Lenawee County. The 63 acres of fields and 39 acres of riparian woods continue to be flooded in the spring as Nature dictates, but these floodwaters no longer carry away vast quantities topsoil, as they once did following the yearly plowing.

The condition of the River Raisin still needs



A wintery view of a tributary of the River Raisin

A look back, continued

our help, but by assembling easements such as these, RVLTL is working to improve the well-being of the river. It is our hope that these stretches

of river will set an example of the balance between people and nature that humans hold in their hands.

More about conservation easements and CREP

Conservation easement

A legal agreement entered into voluntarily between a landowner and a land trust or government agency to protect a property's conservation values – natural features, agricultural potential, scenic views, wildlife habitat, water quality – while keeping the land in private ownership. The easement defines use of the land for all current and future landowners.

CREP

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program was created to address the issues of soil erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The Michigan Department of Agriculture partners with the federal government to preserve vulnerable land areas as part of a comprehensive effort to protect Michigan's land, water and wildlife.

Farmers and landowners in three watersheds, including the River Raisin watershed, can receive reimbursement for establishing practices on eligible farmland, incentive payments for sign up, and rental payments for the length of the contract, which is typically 15 years. After the contract is complete, the farmer is free to return the land to agricultural use, or to sell the property to be developed according to the local zoning ordinance.

CREP and the River Raisin

Many acres along the River Raisin were cleared for farming over a century ago. Though the soil is rich, regular flooding makes farming these riparian acres difficult, and contributes to excessive sedimentation of the river.

Landowners who enrolled in certain CREP practices in the River Raisin watershed in 2001 were also eligible to receive payment to place a permanent conservation easement on the CREP practice areas. Once the CREP contract is completed, the landowner must still abide by the terms in the Conservation Easement, which ensures the property will remain undeveloped. The RVLTL is glad to be a partner in this effort to improve the water quality of the River Raisin.

These easements were funded by a grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, which contracted with the RVLTL to implement the program in the River Raisin watershed. Check out <http://lenaweeconservationdistrict.org/crep> or contact Lauren Lindemann at the Lenawee Conservation District to find out more (517-263-7400 ext 119).

Find us on Facebook!

You can now find the "Raisin Valley Land Trust" on Facebook. "Like" us to learn more about the month-to-month activities of RVLTL and our members, and to connect with other local residents concerned about the health of our watershed.

With nearly two dozen "likes" so far, we're off to a good start, but we'd love to double or triple that number in 2012!



Our path forward

The board of the Raisin Valley Land Trust is committed to enter our 20th year with greater focus on our mission and a revitalized sense of purpose. As you may be aware, we are an entirely volunteer organization and our board members are putting in long hours to ensure that our members continue to be proud of their support for RVLТ. To this end, we have been working over the past year to develop a 3-year strategic plan that will guide our actions in every aspect of our work.

This plan started at a board retreat in June where all board members shared their ideas and values. Since that initial meeting, we have examined each opportunity and prioritized our work to incorporate the science of conservation with the land ethic and values we want our organization to represent. The board takes the contributions of our supporters seriously, and therefore decided to put even greater focus on actions consistent with our mission that will deliver the greatest tangible results for our members and demonstrate success in the communities where we operate.

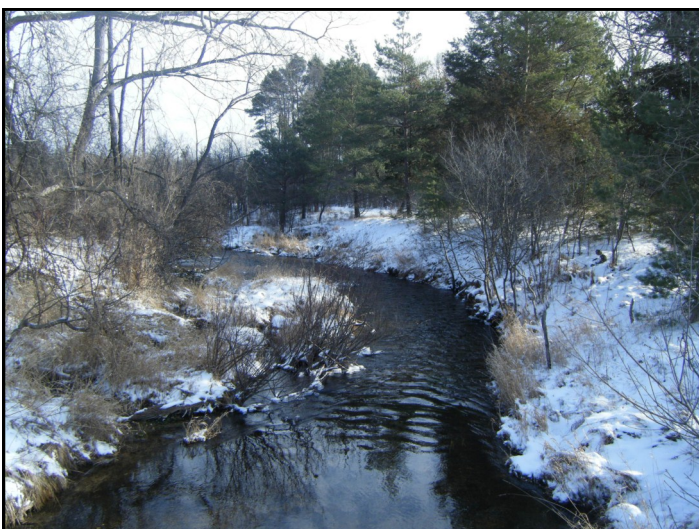
To make this a comprehensive strategy, we knew we needed to also incorporate other aspects of our work, including how we talk about and advertise our work as well as how we fund these efforts. You may notice a fresh look to our newsletter, and that we are making it more environmentally friendly by providing options for email delivery or download from our website.

For 20 years, The Raisin Valley Land Trust has protected land in the River Raisin watershed, and we

now hold 14 easements, totaling 603 acres. We need to insure that these achievements are not lost, and to put our organization on the path to a more financially sustainable path. As the size of our reach grows and the Land Trust takes on bigger and more complex projects, so grow the demands on board members' time and financial support.

So, what does this all mean for your Raisin Valley Land Trust?

1. We are excited to announce that we are launching an effort to expand land protection in the headwaters of the River Raisin, the Goose Creek! This strategic decision is based on three primary factors. First, the Goose Creek represents the start of the River Raisin, so every person and community along its path will benefit from our work here. Second, some of the best habitat for rare species and the best-remaining natural communities are in the headwaters of the river, so our efforts will benefit them as well. Third, this area remains underserved by the conservation community; despite its importance, no group has protected any land in the Goose Creek in over a decade! We will kick off this effort by trying to secure an easement in this area through our 319 grant, and we received support for this effort in the form of a grant from our new partner, Michigan International Speedway (see page 2).
2. We will work harder to keep our members informed by providing a detailed and informative newsletter two times each year. This newsletter will be available online and for download so that it can be easily shared. We encourage each and every RVLТ donor to share this newsletter with their family and friends, and to talk to them about joining. We are proud to be a grassroots organization that depends on each member to take action. In addition, our volunteer board is making a commitment to reconnect with each and every member personally in the coming year.
3. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, starting January 1, we are launching a 2-year, \$27,000 capital campaign to fund the Land Trust for years to come! Because we have no paid staff, 100 percent of all donations to RVLТ go directly to our conservation operations. Donations will go into our sustainability fund, which will provide a sta-



Goose Creek, January 2012
(photo by Steve Woods)

Our path forward, continued

ble funding stream to allow us to continue to protect and monitor our easements and serve the River Raisin watershed in perpetuity!

In both a literal and figurative sense, this is a watershed moment for RVLT. With your support, we have realized a great deal of success for an organization of our size, and for that, you should be deeply

proud. Yet to accomplish our mission, we will need to do so much more. We appreciate all that our members have done for us in the past 20 years; the board extends our deepest appreciation as we look forward to the next 20 years of accomplishments.

— Steve Woods

Good resources

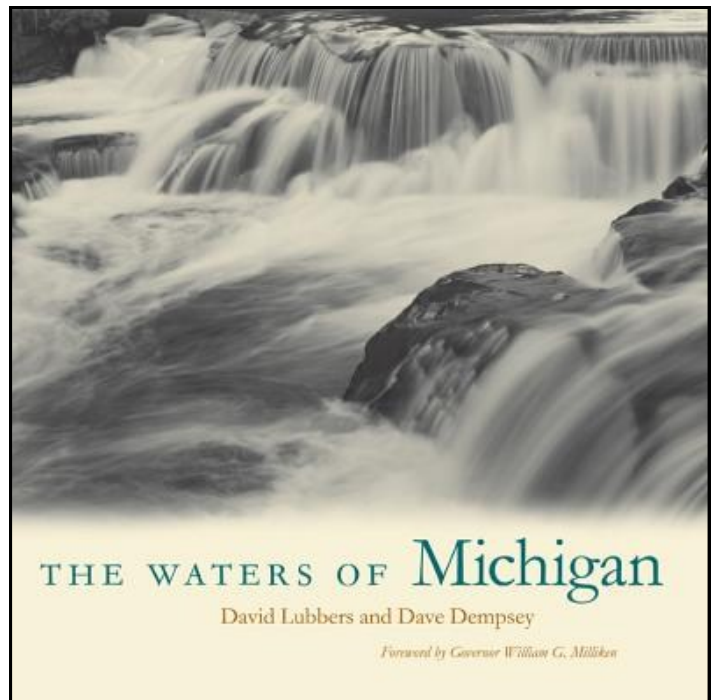
Green Fire, a movie by the Aldo Leopold Foundation.

“The first full-length, high-definition documentary film ever made about legendary environmentalist Aldo Leopold, *Green Fire* highlights Leopold’s extraordinary career, tracing how he shaped and influenced the modern environmental movement. Leopold remains relevant today, inspiring projects all over the country that connect people and land.”

RVLT will be arranging exclusive viewings; call (734) 428-8108 for more information.

The Waters of Michigan, by David Lubbers and Dave Dempsey (Michigan State University Press, March 2008, 96 pages).

“This book presents Michigan’s greatest resource through the lens of a camera ... Combining the vision of internationally renowned photographer David Lubbers with the stewardship focus of environmentalist Dave Dempsey, this collection presents a truly unique view and understanding of the waters of Michigan. *Waters of Michigan* is a call to all who know the state of Michigan to re see this wonder that is ours and to realize how precious and fragile it is.”



Dates announced: workshops with the River Raisin Partnership!

Find out how you can preserve your land forever! Raisin Valley Land Trust, Legacy Land Conservancy, and the Stewardship Network are hosting a series of informational workshops directed toward landowners in the River Raisin watershed. These workshops will highlight various ways landowners can protect the quality of their land, as well as the River Raisin.

The series of meetings will explore the benefits of protecting land under conservation easements. (Please see page 5 for more information on easements). Each conservation easement is tailored to meet the needs of the landowner, and farmers will still be able to work the land as they always have.

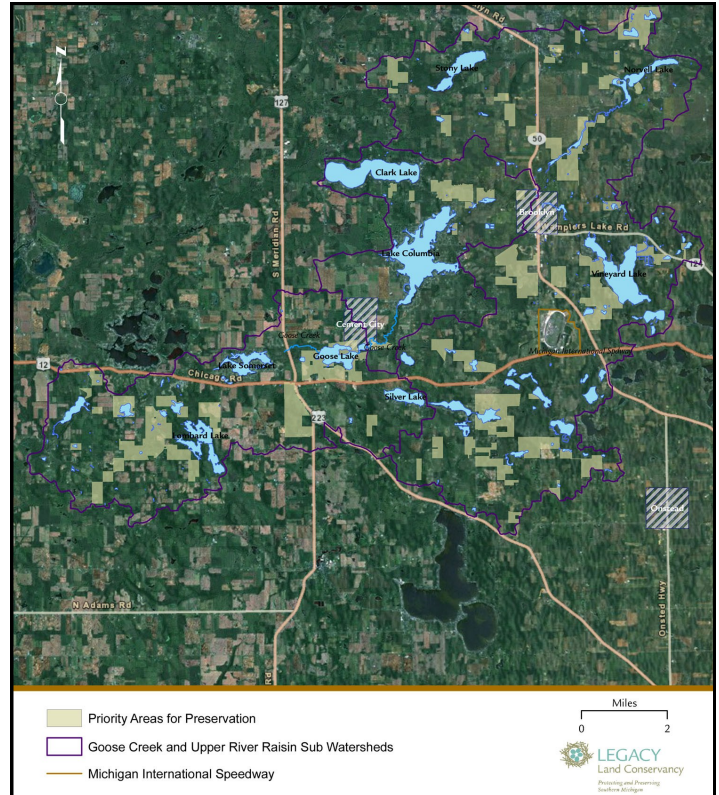
Workshop attendees will hear testimonials from landowners, as well as advice from a guest panel including financial and legal experts, and from representatives from area land conservation agencies.

Meeting dates and locations:

- Thursday, March 1st, 7 pm - 9 pm @ Columbia Township Hall in Brooklyn
- Saturday, March 10th, 10 am - 12 pm @ Manchester Village Hall (in the public library)
- Thursday, March 22nd, 7 pm - 9 pm @ Somerset Center Community Building

For more information, contact:

- Susan Cooley, communications and development director at Legacy Land Conservancy
- susancooley@legacylandconservancy.org
- (734) 302-5263



Raisin Valley Land Trust Membership Form

Mail this form to:

Raisin Valley Land Trust, 126 E. Church Street, Adrian, Michigan 49221

If you have questions, call (734) 428-8108 or e-mail skolon@rvlt.org

Name _____

Address _____

E-mail _____

Phone _____ Date _____

I want to receive the Land Trust newsletter only: _____ (\$10 annually)

I want to be a full voting member of the Land Trust: _____ (\$25 or more annually)

My company would like to be a corporate sponsor: _____ (\$100 or more annually)

Please list the person above as the voting representative.