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- susceptible to pollution from fertilizers, wastewater, trash disposal, etc.).
- Avoid vehicle use or even other types of recreational over-use, as wetlands soils are often soft, weak and easily damaged.
- Obtain permits for regulated activities (in spite of the generally bad reputation of the regulatory processes, agency staff review can result in positive suggestions for more successful projects).

Wetlands are interesting and often unusual places to explore and enjoy. Here are some activities to consider pursuing in your wetland:

- Watch birds, fish, dragonflies or other wildlife
- Hunt, fish, or trap
- Identify or photograph wetland plants
- Install nest boxes for waterfowl, owls, or other wildlife
- Participate in the State-wide Spring frog and toad survey
- Ski or snowshoe in winter (winter is a great time to explore wetlands, when water and muck is frozen and insects are absent)

Constructing trails through wetlands

Trails are a commonly desired and sometimes permissible activity on easement properties. However, when trails cannot avoid wetlands, a boardwalk may be needed both to facilitate foot travel and protect wetland soils and vegetation.

LTC has about 25 nature preserves with maintained trail systems totaling about 40 miles. Although we try to avoid constructing trails through wetlands, our trails none-the-less contain a few boardwalk sections. We typically construct small, simple boardwalks using two to four 2" X 12" treated lumber planks laid on 6" X 6" treated lumber cross-ties placed at 3' to 4' intervals (see photo). We've found that this safe, effective technique for conveying pedestrians through wetlands has minimal wetland impact and is relatively low-cost (about \$8.00 per linear foot).

If you're considering a trail construction project in a wetland, be sure to read your easement closely to determine if trails and wetland boardwalks are allowed. Also, be aware that permits are needed for all structures built in regulated wetlands, even boardwalks and fences. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you need help interpreting your easement. LTC Stewardship staff would also be happy to give you some help and advice on identifying and delineating wetlands and on design and permitting of appropriate boardwalks. For more information about wetlands, boardwalks, etc. please visit the Stewardship page of LTC's website: www.landtrust.org.



Above: An example of a boardwalk over a wetland.
Photo Below: The long-eared owl at Waldron Fen, the first time the species has been documented in Emmet County.



photos courtesy Kenyon Stebbins

Stew Crew 2009



Doug Fuller



Cindy Mom



Charles Dawley



Reb Ratliff



John Bailey

Monitoring Schedule Spring, 2009

Ground & Aerial Monitoring

In previous years, we have designated certain times during which we planned our ground monitoring of properties protected with conservation easements. However, we are now asking if we may have permission to conduct on-the-ground easement monitoring at unspecified times between April 13-October 30, 2009. The reasoning for this is that in the course of our travels for nature preserve management, it would oftentimes be convenient to conduct monitoring at a nearby easement property when time allows. Bottom line is that it can save us time and money. But, as always, if you would rather not have us poking around unannounced, if you'd like to accompany us on your easement monitoring, or if you just want to discuss something face to face, we're more than happy to accommodate you. Please contact us at 231.347.0991 to make an appointment. Our aerial monitoring will be completed this spring and is reserved for mostly large and remote properties.

Conservation Easement
Landowner Newsletter



A newsletter for owners of land protected with a conservation easement - Spring 2009

CONSERVATION EASEMENT LANDOWNER PROFILE

This issue is devoted to wetlands, so we asked Nancy and Jack Waldron if we could brag a bit about how well they have managed their own wetlands that are protected with a conservation easement.

A Wetland to Share

ONE OF THE MOST BELOVED BIRDING SPOTS IN EMMET COUNTY IS KNOWN AS WALDRON FEN. BUT IT ISN'T A nature preserve. It is a private property owned by Nancy and Jack Waldron. Ever since the Waldrons purchased the property in 1991 and 1992, the couple has invited nature lovers and birders to come and explore. The land includes a beautiful wetland, called a fen, which provides exceptional habitat for residential and migratory birds as well as numerous other plant and wildlife species. "Thanks to the Waldrons, the Petoskey Regional Audubon Society has provided public nature walks at the fen in all seasons, welcoming 240 participants in the past five years alone," said Sally Stebbins, Field Trip Coordinator for the Petoskey Regional Audubon Society. Stebbins notes that between the Waldrons and the Audubon Society, at least 160 species of birds have been documented at the fen, including uncommon species such as American Bittern, Wilson's Snipe, Snowy Owl, and even a Long-eared Owl, Emmet County's only record of this species. "Nancy and Jack's special knack of so nonchalantly sharing this wonderful property quickly turns visitors into friends who soon appreciate its many treasures," Stebbins added.

A native of Indiana, Nancy Waldron explains that she has always loved the outdoors and "even as a little girl, I would take a rake and make paths on my family's land." Later, she would study horticulture in college. Her connection to northern Michigan began when her parents bought a house on Burt Lake in 1935 where they would spend their summers. Jack grew up in a large farming family near Burt Lake. Today, a shared love of the outdoors and all things green manifests in their raising nearly half of the cut flowers sold at their daughter's flower shop in Alanson.

Nancy recalls one day coming home to Jack's puzzled comment, "Nancy, there is red flagging tape all around the wetland!" "I had forgotten to tell him about the botany class from the (University of Michigan) Biological Station. They had flagged 232 individual pitcher plants and were examining the contents of the fluid collected by the carnivorous plants!"

With the help of staff from Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, the Waldrons have done several things to improve the quality of their wetland and to encourage wildlife to enjoy it. Dozens of bluebird and swallow nesting boxes are found throughout the property. Black bear have been seen wandering through the wetland. In 2001, the Waldrons took the permanent step of ensuring their 145 acres were protected forever by donating a conservation easement. When asked if they have ever regretted the easement, Nancy emphatically remarks, "On no...certainly not! When we first acquired the land, there were only 3 or 4 homes around it and today there are so many more. Most people now think it is a state park."



Left to right: Fellow birding enthusiasts Jack and Nancy Waldron and their friends, Sally and Kenyon Stebbins in southeastern Arizona.

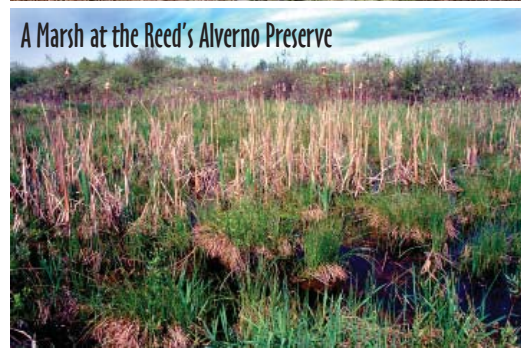


Waldron Fen

photos courtesy Kenyon Stebbins



Stutsmanville Bog Preserve



A Marsh at the Reed's Alverno Preserve



A Swamp at the Bubbling Springs Preserve

Wetlands: Much More than Mud and Weeds

Wetlands and Conservation Easements

If you read closely through your conservation easement, you'll likely run across several references to wetlands. They are often listed as a "conservation value" of the property. In the Prohibited Uses Section, most easements state that "natural water courses, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water may not be altered." In the Permitted Uses Section, there is often language stating something like "the owner is required to obtain Federal, State, or Local permits that might be mandatory for activities in wetlands" (a permit is required for dredging, draining, filling, or construction activities in wetlands hydrologically connected to a Great Lake, inland lake, or stream).

What is a Wetland?

Features like lakes and streams are pretty evident to everyone, but wetlands can be much less so. Wetlands are defined in Michigan's Wetland Protection Act as "land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under natural circumstances does support, wetland vegetation or aquatic life and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp, or marsh." More simply put, wetlands are a transition area between uplands and aquatic habitats. It is estimated that half of wetlands have been lost, both in Michigan and nation-wide.

Basic Types of Wetlands

The three basic types of wetlands are defined as follows (although sometimes the difference between each are not clear-cut, and each wetland is ultimately unique).

Marsh - A wetland dominated by grass-like vegetation (including true grasses as well as rushes, reeds, sedges, and cattails).

Swamp - A wetland dominated by trees and/or shrubs. A conifer swamp is dominated by trees such as cedar, balsam fir, or tamarack. A hardwood swamp is dominated by species like red maple, black ash, American elm, or balsam poplar. Many swamps are a mixture of hardwoods and conifers. A shrub swamp is dominated by species like alder, willow, viburnum, and dogwood.

Bog - Acidic, peat accumulating wetlands dominated by sphagnum mosses and other acid-tolerant vegetation. "True" bogs form in basins isolated from ground water or surface runoff, and have very acidic water chemistry. A **fen** is a similar peat-accumulating wetland that forms in very wet areas, often with a cool microclimate, but which has some connection with groundwater or receives mineralized surface runoff. As such, water chemistry in fens can range from slightly acidic to basic. A better collective name for both these wetland types are **northern peatlands**. Peat is a type of organic soil wherein the conditions are too wet for the vegetation to decompose much, and so bits of roots, stems, leaves, etc. are recognizable.

Conservation Easements by County as of March 2009	# Easements	Acres	
	Charlevoix County	65	3,228
	Cheboygan County	48	7,117
	Chippewa County	16	3,485
	Emmet County	106	4,226
	Mackinaw County	17	491
	TOTAL	252	16,480

Why are Wetlands Worth Protecting?

Wetlands provide the following important ecological functions and socio-economic values:

- Fish and wildlife habitat
- Threatened & endangered species habitat
- Water pollution protection
- Erosion and sedimentation control
- Water supply
- Flood storage
- Hunting, fishing, and trapping
- Food and fiber production
- Education and research
- Recreation
- Aesthetic values
- Historic/archaeologic significance



An Emmet County conservation easement



A Charlevoix County conservation easement

Identifying the Wetlands on Your Land

Whether the need to protect wetlands arises out of regulatory requirements or voluntary desire, wetlands must first be identified in order to be protected. Standardized methods for identifying and delineating wetlands based on a site's hydrology, soils, and vegetation have been developed by scientists in collaboration with State and Federal agencies.

The extended presence of water at or on the soil surface during the growing season is termed wetland hydrology and is the most important factor for classifying the land as either an upland or a wetland. Wetland hydrology is present when the soil is continually saturated or inundated (a.k.a. ponded) for about two weeks during the growing season which runs roughly from mid-May to early-October in northern Michigan.

Soils that form in the presence of wetland hydrology, called hydric soils, have distinct colors, patterns, textures, odors, or chemical characteristics. County soil surveys published by the Natural Resource Conservation Service can help identify hydric soils on your property.

Only vegetation with specific physiological adaptations can survive in saturated soils for extended periods during the growing season. Such vegetation is termed hydrophytic or wetland-tolerant vegetation. The wetland-tolerance of every plant species has been determined. An area is considered to be a wetland when more than half the dominant vegetation in each vegetation strata (tree, sapling, shrub, and herbaceous plants) consists of wetland-tolerant species.

Of course, not everyone has the training and skills needed to identify the common vegetation species or soil types. Consultants are available to help provide precise identification and delineation of wetlands. In lieu of that, here is a list of some "common sense" indicators to the presence of wetlands on your property:

- Low-lying areas along streambanks or lakeshores
- Depressions where water commonly pools
- Low-lying areas with distinctly different plants than surrounding higher areas
- Areas with seepages or springs
- Low areas where you would likely get stuck driving off-road vehicle
- Places where your white tennis shoes get black and mucky.
- Wherever the ground is soggy underfoot for extended periods from May to October.

Enjoying and Protecting Your Wetland

If you received this newsletter, you likely have already taken a very important step in protecting wetlands that may be present on your property by having a conservation easement in place - congratulations and thank you! Beyond that, simply being mindful that wetlands are sensitive habitats where almost any human activity will have some type of negative impact and acting accordingly by avoiding or minimizing damaging activities can help. Specifically, these might include the following:

- Minimize tree removal. Even small openings can let in more wind, resulting in blow-downs of shallow-rooted trees in wetlands. Large-scale tree removal can cause permanent changes in hydrology, causing the land to become permanently wetter (because the transpirational effects of trees are lost).
- Maintain a well-vegetated buffer in the upland around the wetland.
- Keep pollutants out of wetlands (the fact that water is pervasive and near the surface in wetlands makes it more

Please call us, if...

...you are selling your property that is protected with a conservation easement. This will ensure that the new owners are aware of and understand the conservation easement.

...you plan to exercise one of the rights retained in your conservation easement.

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