

RED-TAIL CONSERVANCY ANNUAL REPORT 2005



Goose Nest on Cabin Creek :: Yuhas Woods

Prepared by

**Barry Banks,
Executive Director**

RED-TAIL CONSERVANCY ANNUAL REPORT May, 2005

Overview

It is with great satisfaction that I report to the membership of Red-tail Conservancy that your land conservation organization has enjoyed yet another year of stellar performance. We completed four land acquisition projects, our membership levels are trending upward, our committees are becoming active in key roles, and our fundraising efforts continue to provide the necessary funding. Let's look at the details.

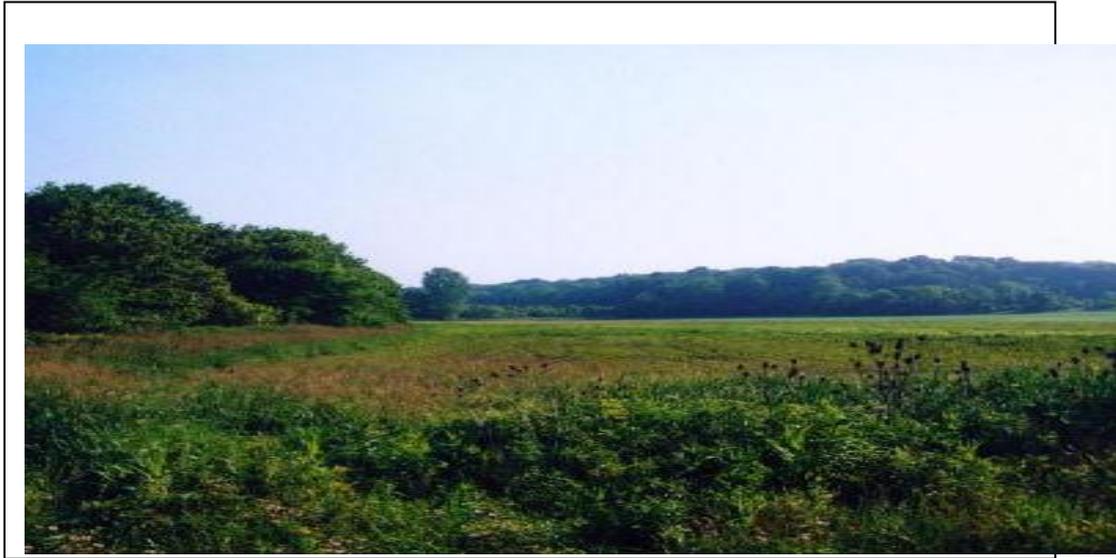
Land Acquisitions and Stewardship

The fall of 2004 will always be remembered as the time when RTC passed the 1000-acre milestone. This is a great accomplishment, but even more remarkable is that we did it in just five years. I attribute our rapid growth to our board and membership funding a full-time staff person within twelve months of our formation. However, my talents and passion for land preservation would never have preserved a single acre without the structure of our organization being formed by a few dedicated board members, and an active segment of the community of east central Indiana supporting our efforts. Here is a summary of the completed land acquisition projects for the last twelve months.

BUSKIRK CONSERVATION AGREEMENT: In November, Earlham professor, William Buskirk, chose to permanently protect the natural quality of his wooded ravines by signing a Conservation Agreement with Red-tail Conservancy. This 39-acre parcel in Wayne County is a fine example of mature hardwood forest that once covered the entire region. There are two streams meandering through the ravines that form a series of waterfalls. The exact location depicted here is where we held the signing ceremony. It is truly a glorious place. Red-tail Conservancy is honored to partner with Professor Buskirk to see that this forest remains a haven for wildlife forever.



ASHTON CONSERVATION AGREEMENT: In September 2003 Will Ditzler, CEO of JFNew, approached RTC seeking a land conservation organization to partner with in the upper White River watershed. This environmental engineering company was starting a Wetland Bank for properties being developed near Indianapolis and asked that RTC search for landowners in ECI with land that met the criteria and who wished to participate in the program. I forwarded a good number of potential sites for wetland construction, and in November 2004, Hal Ashton became the first landowner to participate in this program.



This wetland mitigation project calls for nineteen acres of crop land in the flood plain of Lick Creek in southern Madison County to be placed under the protection of a Conservation Easement with JFNew. RTC is named as the Assignee in the CE. JF NEW will restore the area to a native wetland, and as soon as all the requirements of the wetland mitigation are completed, the permanent CE will be assigned to our land trust.

RTC is pleased to partner with JF New in this program that will allow for development in one portion of the watershed, but will actually increase the total area of wetlands by reconstructing wetlands in formerly developed areas at a 2-to-1 or 3-to-1 ratio. Hal Ashton's field that was partially flooded almost every year, will now yield a row crop on the high portion and provide wildlife habitat in the low areas. This is an example of how RTC seeks to maintain balance between land preservation and development.

FRANK & PHYLLIS YUHAS WOODS: Larry Perkins called the RTC office in early December seeking help to protect an 83-acre parcel that was going on the auction block in just three weeks. Upon inspecting the woods, I found this parcel to be one of the most ecologically significant areas in east central Indiana. The upland portion of the woods includes numerous seasonal and depression wetlands. Cabin Creek runs through the eastern section of the woods, and the creek valley is a series of wetlands formed from the seeps and springs emerging from the bluffs on both sides of the creek. The woods is home to a variety of native invasive plant species and stands as a living museum.



I initiated a rigorous fundraising campaign and received numerous generous donations from Phyllis Yuhas and Danny Huelskamp. RTC members, supporters and I attended the land auction and now holds title to the Yuhas Woods. RTC members are currently conducting an inventory of the plant species and are finding numerous rare plants and are lauding it as one of the most significant natural areas in the region.



h
ncy

BLUE RIVER BOTTOMS: The highest priority natural areas for RTC to preserve are along the existing waterways. Because east central Indiana's wildlife habitat areas are fragmented, it is important to protect these corridors so that individual plants and animals can more easily move between these isolated areas. Where possible we strive to expand the corridors, and this is exactly what was achieved by this project. RTC board member Jeff Ray and I had negotiated with the owners of this 19 acre parcel along the Big Blue River for over two years. In mid-2004, we arrived at an agreement with the owners to purchase the woods.

Jeff Ray took to the task of raising funds to purchase this riparian, wooded wetland. Through his personal efforts and generosity, RTC was able to acquire title in December. Since then, Jeff, Randy Jones, and numerous volunteers have spent many hours in the woods planting native hardwoods, clearing invasive non-native plants and cutting a trail. Since this wildlife haven is located on the outskirts of New Castle on heavily traveled CR 100S, it will stand as a showcase for our local land conservation programs.

STEWARDSHIP: Now that Red-tail Conservancy has completed seventeen land acquisitions protecting 1148 acres, our monitoring and management responsibilities have increased immensely. RTC's Stewardship Committee has taken on many of the tasks. Committee chair Kevin Tungesvick and volunteers Jeff Ray, Randy Jones, Kem Badger, and Byron Torke have been active throughout the past year with many projects.

They have planted trees at the Red-tail Nature Preserve and Blue River Bottoms. A major restoration project funded by an \$8,000 federal grant is underway at the Hagerstown Nature Preserve. An \$8,000 grant have planted 1500 bare-rooted hardwood trees this spring, and will complete the project in the fall with the planting of 680 potted trees. These plantings will guide the return of this site to the forested wetland that it was prior to European settlement. We are deeply grateful to CINergy Services, Inc. for providing the \$2125 matching funds and Archeological Resources Management Service

The committee has been active in planning the future for Yuhas Woods. This high quality property has attracted the attention of state and private land conservation organizations, and we must consider options that will provide permanent protection for the woods as well as establish partners for future stewardship obligations. These are complicated decisions with long term affects. RTC is fortunate to have an engaged and talented committee to set the course in these upcoming negotiations.

In partnership with JF New and Ball State University, RTC conducted a prescribed burn last winter at the fifteen acre restored prairie in the Red-tail Nature Preserve. This procedure is necessary to keep down the woody growth, remove residue so that wildflowers receive more early-season sunlight, and motivate seed germination in many desired plant species. Primary concerns during a prairie burn are safety of the participants and liability. Our partners provided experienced, qualified personnel and liability insurance protection. The burn was conducted as per plan without incident. The prairie is now vigorously entering its fourth growing season.



Friend-raising

In this year's report, I am combining the last two sections, Membership and Fundraising, to reflect the new course RTC is taking in our approach to supporting our budget while sharing our mission with a widening cross-section of our communities.

The fundraising letters still go out. A significant portion of our operations budget will most assuredly be provided by our membership and potential new members responding to the direct appeals of this type. The fundraising events that have served us so well will continue to take place. The Red-tail Birdathon, Red-tail Run, and Open Space: Art About the Land have been well attended, well supported, and engage segments of our population that are willing to support local land conservation. Our membership roles, both individual and corporate, are trending up. George and Frances Ball Foundation once again granted our request for operating funds.

The difference will be a focus on reconnecting the people of east central Indiana to the land. Most land preservation advocates are motivated by an admiration for land and a high regard for its natural value. But the vast majority of the populace have become separated from the land. RTC has initiated a Friend-raising Campaign which will encourage people, organizations, church groups, and schools to visit our wildlife preserves. By holding fun, educational celebrations on Red-tail lands, we will work to help people understand nature and feel more comfortable in our woods and wetlands. We launched our campaign with a Spring Wildflower Celebration in Yuhas Woods. We were delighted to have over 120 people there to enjoy the beauty and splendor of native wildflowers. Pictured here is one of eight guided tours conducted by Red-tail experts Don Ruch, Ken Badger, and Kevin Tungesvick.



In Conclusion

Red-tail Conservancy has experienced another year of successfully accomplishing our mission. I am especially encouraged by the active roles our committees are playing in the various tasks that are critical to the everyday operation of our land conservation organization. The outpour of generosity from our community is certainly a telling measure of the trust and respect RTC has garnered since our inception six years ago. I look forward to expanding our programs while remaining focused on preserving, restoring and protecting east central Indiana's natural areas.

Respectfully submitted
For the land

Barry Banks,
Executive Director

