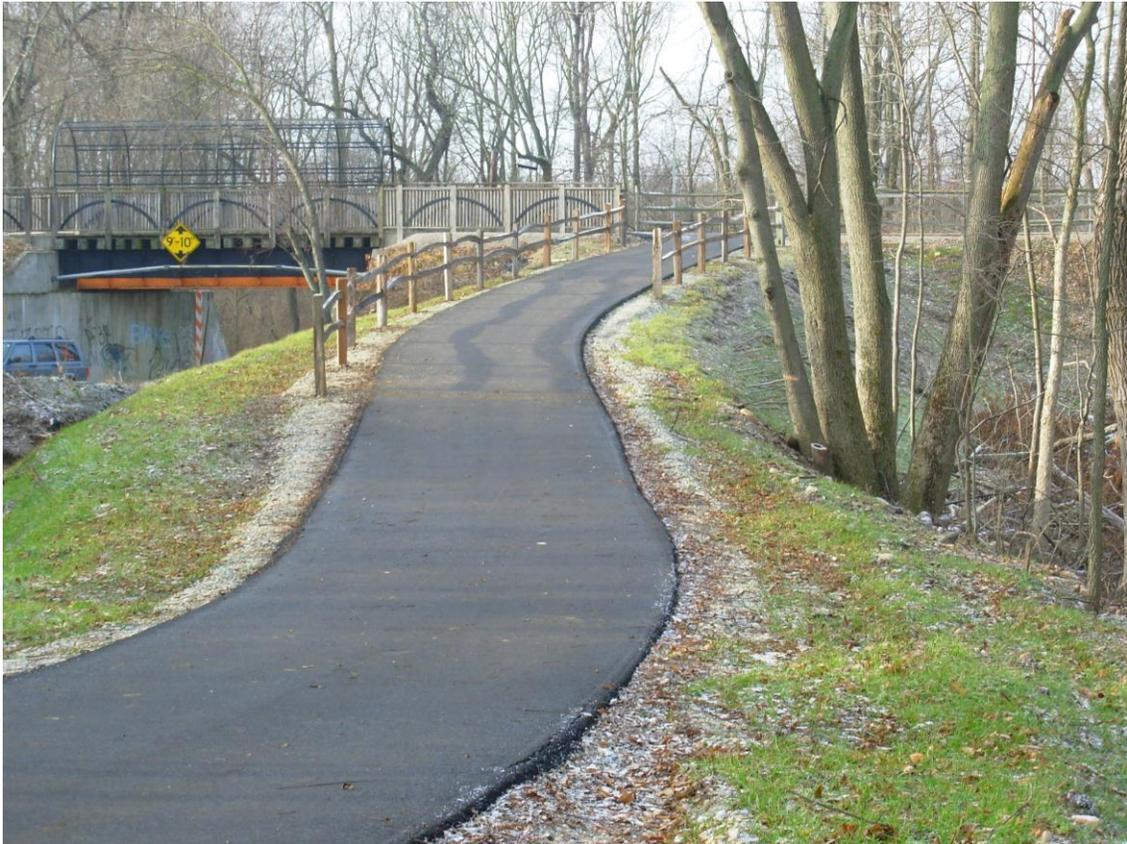


# **RED-TAIL CONSERVANCY ANNUAL REPORT 2008**



**Trail connecting Red-tail Nature Preserve to Cardinal Greenway**

**Prepared by**

**Barry Banks,  
Executive Director**

# **RED-TAIL CONSERVANCY**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

### **May, 2008**

#### **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 accomplishing our mission in east central Indiana. We completed our largest land acquisition project. RTC's first Indiana Heritage Trust land acquisition grant has been approved by their trustees and will enable us to acquire title to a splendid forty-acre woods this summer. To top off our land acquisition accomplishments this year, we completed phase three at the Red-tail Nature Preserve. That is, we connected the loop trail in the eighteen-acre prairie to the Cardinal Greenway.

RTC's membership levels are holding steady, our board has completed a five-year strategic plan, and our fundraising efforts continue to provide the necessary funding. Let's look at the details.

#### **Land Acquisitions**

Our total acres protected took a giant step forward this year with one acquisition; the Nixon conservation easement. This 411-acre pact brought our total acres protected to 1587 acres on twenty-four sites in five counties. With a good number of projects approaching completion, our numbers will most assuredly continue to climb in the years to come.

As for stewardship, the natural areas that we protect are under siege by non-native plants. Red-tailers have taken to the woods and prairies in large numbers to combat this onslaught. We're holding our own, but more help and expertise will be necessary to keep the invaders at bay.

**NIXON CONSERVATION AGREEMENT:** While protecting natural areas has been RTC's top priority, from the very beginning, the board of directors has included farm land as a land use that our land trust should protect. Loss of farm land to residential, commercial, and industrial development is an issue with which RTC can be involved. The Nixon CE is our fourth agreement that has a significant ag-land component.

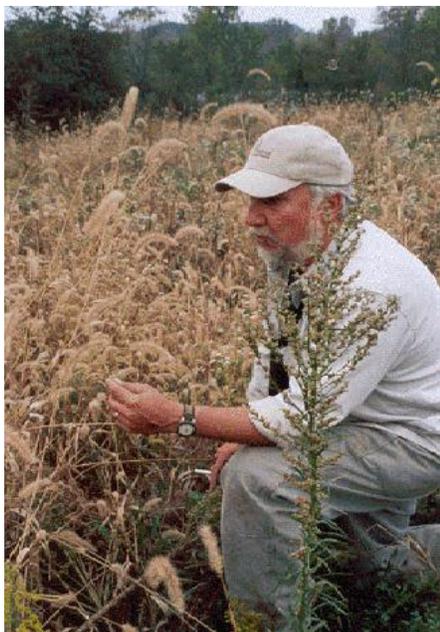
This project was spurred on by a federal bill that significantly increased the land conservation tax incentive. For a farmer this bill increased his federal income tax deduction from thirty percent to one hundred percent of the adjusted gross income as well as increasing the time to apply the deduction from five years to fifteen years.



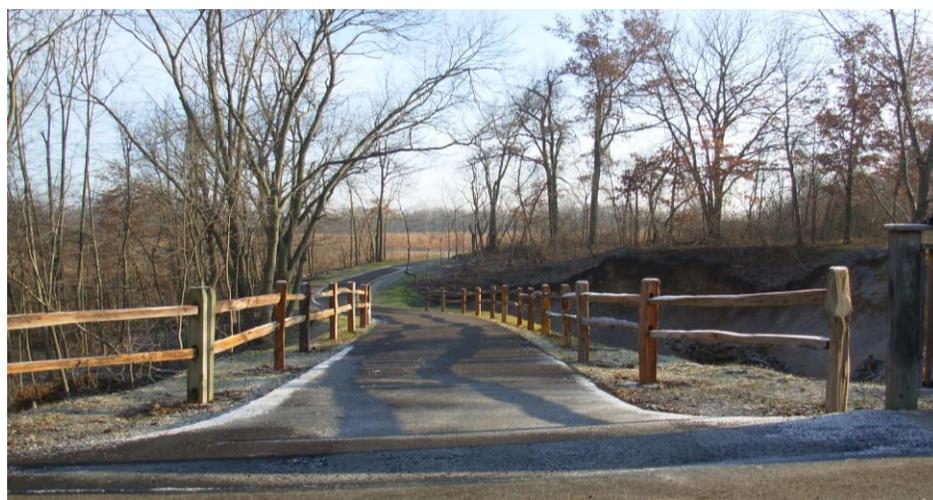
Dennis Nixon had considered government programs that would enable him to keep much of his farm land in ag production. After looking at the new financial incentives and the reputation of our local land trust, Dennis and Kathy Nixon agreed to an agreement that will keep 411 acres in crop production. They also agreed to a stewardship donation of \$30,000 to be paid over a four year period. Much of this donation will go into an RTC endowment fund to ensure that our organization is financially able to meet our future obligations.



**RED-TAIL NATURE PRESERVE—PHASE THREE:** A brief history of the RTNP is in order to truly appreciate the significance of completing “phase three”. This 105-acre site that spans the area between the Cardinal Greenway and the southwest corner of Prairie Creek Reservoir Park was the first land acquisition project undertaken by RTC in 1999. The initial plan had four phases: land acquisition, prairie restoration, loop trail connected to the greenway, and a nature center. The idea was that if we proceeded in that order, if we must stop at any phase, it would still be a worthwhile project.



It took until March 2002 to acquire the land. That same year we procured a grant to plant the prairie. The prairie matured ahead of schedule. As depicted here, I spent many wonderful hours during five growing seasons, maintaining and watching over the prairie. Once it had become established and stable, grants were approved by Ball Brothers Foundation, Community Foundation of Muncie & Delaware County, George & Francis Ball Foundation, and the Kitzelman Fund to construct the loop trail and parking lot. This was accomplished in the fall of 2006, but we ran into a legal technicality that delayed construction of the connector to the Cardinal Greenway for another year. I am pleased to report to the membership that as depicted below, phase three of the Red-tail Nature Preserve is at long-last completed.





**ALICE CRISLER WOODS:** This project is still in process, but it involves a milestone for RTC and should be included in this report.

I initiated this land preservation project in 2002, when a RTC member called about a great woods just north of Mechanicsburg. I obtained permission to walk the woods, and what I discovered was a unique, diverse natural area that I would spend the next six years trying to permanently protect. One reason this woods is so unique is that it includes the four distinct stages of forest succession: old field, early succession, middle succession and mature forest. It will serve as a perfect training site to show the community how a woods will eventually recover from developmental disturbance.



Another unique feature of this woods is that it's located along the heights of the Fall Creek valley and is incised by two separate, meandering creeks. It is therefore an extremely hilly parcel that provides stunning vistas across wooded valleys. The views from the bluffs are indeed captivating. The picture to the left shows a majestic Chinquapin Oak clinging to the base of a bluff on the scour side of a bend in Deer Creek. Such natural splendor exists throughout the woods

This spring, Alice Krisler's heirs decided to graciously sell the woods to Red-tail Conservancy at a fraction of its value. This opened the door to us procuring an Indiana Heritage Trust grant to purchase the woods

and dedicate it as the first state nature preserve owned by RTC. In the past, we have come close to utilizing this state fund. Now we stand to soon obtain title to this magnificent site.

I must share a land protection disappointment that occurred this year, also. After countless hours of negotiations and numerous drafts of a conservation agreement, we reached in impasse with one of the owners of a ten-acre woodlands in the Carrington Woods residential development along the Cardinal Greenway north of Muncie. This project was complicated by having multiple owners, which greatly increases the risk of miscommunications. This project offered our first opportunity to be directly involved with Green Development. I will continue to try to complete this project at a future date.

Red-tail Conservancy has a compiled numerous ongoing land projects that are complicated and take years to conclude. In general, we are looking at becoming involved in EPA super-fund sites, more mitigation projects that will restore riparian woodlands and wetlands, and to my great pleasure, the actual woods that I played in as a youngster. Due to the sensitivity of negotiations, the details should go unmentioned. It does give me much motivation to continue the work of land conservation in our communities, knowing that there is so much vital, high quality land to be saved.

## **Stewardship**

It's been said that a picture's worth a thousand words. Then the picture below is worth that and hundreds of hours of volunteers' time, trying to eradicate the non-native Garlic mustard pictured below. Volunteers from Ball State, Earlham, and the members of our land trust have worked diligently



this spring to continue to rid our sites of this and other aggressive species.

It is a monumental task that is not glamorous; it is tedious, boring, and strenuous when done for hours on end. But it is necessary, and Red-tail Conservancy is blessed with many people who give their time and effort to keep our natural areas as diverse as possible.

We have no other stewardship activities more important than this. I ask that all members who are physically able to contact the office to schedule time in the field. There's nothing more rewarding than to know you're a part of the solution to this ongoing challenge to the diversity of wildlife habitat.

## **Friend-raising**

The fundraising letters continue to be effective. 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, and Open Space: Art About the Land have been well attended, well supported, and find new folks in our community that care about local land conservation. Our membership roles, both individual and corporate are holding steady. George and Frances Ball Foundation once again granted our request for operating funds.

## **In Conclusion**

Red-tail Conservancy has experienced another year of successfully accomplishing our mission. The outpour of generosity from our community is certainly a telling measure of the trust and respect RTC has garnered since our inception nine years ago. I look forward to our tenth anniversary next year. The celebration will launch our programs forward into our second decade of land conservation successes.

Respectfully submitted.

For the land

Barry Banks, Executive Director

