



**RED-TAIL CONSERVANCY
TENTH ANNIVERSARY
ANNUAL REPORT
2009**



FIRST ANNUAL MEETING

Back Row (L to R) Ron Bonham, Dennis Pickens, Hugh Brown, Amy Kress, Charles Mortensen, Sheryl Myers, Timothy McBride, Ron Guyre. Front Row: Brian Gordy, Barry Banks, Hunter Banks, Helen Steussy, Diana Torke.

**Prepared by:
Barry Banks,
Executive Director**

RED-TAIL CONSERVANCY ANNUAL REPORT May, 2009

Overview

I find it most appropriate to have a picture from our first annual meeting on the cover of our tenth annual report. This small group of people is largely responsible for launching Red-tail Conservancy and setting us on a course that would lead RTC to become one of the most productive, local land trusts in Indiana.

While it took many individuals, corporations, and foundations to keep our group moving forward, the glue that held it together has always been the mission: RTC preserves, protects, and restores natural areas and farm land in East Central Indiana while increasing awareness of our natural heritage.

Our communities have embraced local land conservation to a degree that few people anticipated. We were able to fund a staff person a mere thirteen months after our initial public meeting. Two months later we recorded our first Conservation Easement. Since those early successes, we have steadily added site after site to our list of land protected. We restored crop land to prairie, preserve working lands to provide food for future generations, and protect hundreds of acres of woodlands and wetlands.

RTC supporters have much to celebrate at the close of our first decade. We have endured many challenges in these last ten years. However, we must understand our organization's long-term obligations. We must continue to draft and implement sound policies as well as build our endowments to provide a sound, financial future.

RTC's membership levels are holding steady, our board has remained engaged, and our fundraising efforts continue to provide the necessary operations funding. Let's look at some details.

Land Acquisition

MECHANICSBURG WOODS: Red-tail Conservancy has acquired title to our fifth nature preserve, the Mechanicsburg Woods. This project began in 2000, when an RTC member called about a great woods just north of Mechanicsburg. After nine years of discussions and fund-raising, RTC purchases the woods with a grant from the Indiana Heritage Trust (environmental license plate fund).

Located on heights overlooking Fall Creek, this 40-acre wildlife sanctuary, pictured in the center of this photo, contains high quality examples of the four stages of natural succession: an old field, early succession, middle succession, and mature woodlands.

The old-field is located on the upland portion of the site. This area was farmed until 25 years ago. Since then grasses, shrubs, Yellow Poplar, Maple, Walnut,



and Hawthorne trees have started the slow process of recovery. It is excellent habitat for songbirds, hawks, fox, coyote, deer, and a host of other critters.

Around the perimeter of the old-field stands a dense growth of young trees that forms a typical early succession forest. Over the next fifty years, these young hardwoods will compete for sunlight as they form a canopy. The herbaceous zone is also changing from field plants to a blanket of forest wild flowers, grasses, sedges, and bushes.

Much of the remaining area is middle succession woodlands. This young forest is starting to mature with its upper canopy fully intact shading the forest floor where spring ephemerals and Spicebush thrive. Black Walnut, various Hickories, Ash, American Beech, and Yellow Poplar form a diverse forest.

Hidden in the east valley, a mature hardwood forest thrives. Majestic hardwoods tower above a diverse lower canopy, while a rich carpet of wildflowers emerges every spring. Oaks cling to a fifty-foot bluff which provides the hiker a view of one of east central Indiana's finest Oak-Hickory woodlands.



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 an unusually hilly parcel that provides stunning vistas across wooded valleys.

BORGMANN MITIGATION PROJECT:

This project is located a half-mile downstream of Yuhas Woods along Cabin Creek. It is our third mitigation project, which provides funding to restore disturbed land. This rich valley was once grazed by cattle, but will now be reforested and the banks of Cabin Creek stabilized with native grasses and forbs. The installation of trees and native plants has started this week which will improve water and air quality. When the site passes IDEM and Corp of Army Engineers inspections, a conservation easement will be granted to RTC to ensure this restored habitat area remains forever wild.

As always, I have a full-slate of land projects in progress. I constantly receive calls from landowners wanting to learn about the conservation options and services RTC offers. My plate is full; the future of land conservation in ECI is bright.



Stewardship

It's been said that a picture's worth a thousand words. Then this picture is worth that and hundreds of hours of volunteers' time, trying to eradicate the non-native Garlic mustard. 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. Especially noteworthy is BSU

Professor Amy Gregg's environmental careers class. The last two Springs, each member of the class has spent ten hours working to eradicate aggressive non-native plant species. It is a monumental task that is not glamorous. 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. Professor Gregg's outstanding contributions to the community has earned her the 2009 Timothy McBride Memorial, Friend of the Land Award.

Another project worth noting is the beginning of a plan to open Yuhas Woods to the public. The plan has been initiated by the award winning landscape architect firm of Rundell Ernstberger Associates. They have volunteered services to produce a poster with depicting the necessary amenities that will enable RTC to have a well thought-out public nature preserve with a minimal impact on this living museum. This poster will be an outstanding fund-raising tool.

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. We've initiated an online newsletter to provide significant savings to our operations budget. 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

