



RED-TAIL
Land Conservancy

ANNUAL REPORT 2013



A newborn fawn hunkers down in Yuhus Woods.

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“We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us.

When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it **with love and respect.**” --- Aldo Leopold

Overview

As Red-tail Land Conservancy moves through its fifteenth year of existence, I continue to be inspired by the wisdom of Aldo Leopold. This has been a year of purchasing land and having another of our prized possessions dedicated as an Indiana State Nature Preserve. Because of funding made available by the Bicentennial Nature Trust, local foundations, and individuals; we will most assuredly purchase more sites within the coming years.

However, these transactions are the result of our society’s system of land proprietorship. They are words and numbers on official documents which bestow to RLC for the foreseeable future, the responsibility to oversee these lands, and to preserve, protect, and restore them in the best interest of the biota that dwell therein. Further, we hold them out to the public as examples of our natural heritage, and encourage them to join us in their stewardship and in the pure joy of maintaining natural areas in east central Indiana for future generations.

So, as Red-tail continues to accomplish our mission, let us not lose site of the wisdom of Aldo Leopold. Let us proceed with due reverence and respect for the land, understanding what a privilege it is to be the temporary, humble stewards of these splendid natural and working lands. And, let us rededicate ourselves to maintaining and strengthening our corporate structure which affords us this privilege.

Land Acquisitions

STOUT MEMORIAL WOODLAND: Many of our land acquisition projects take years to unfold. “Complexity” is a word that describes the main reason behind this phenomenon. The purchase of Stout Memorial Woodland is a perfect example. RLC’s involvement with this exquisite forest began in 2001, when Randy Jones was considering becoming a board member. His one prerequisite was that our land trust take on the task of permanently protecting this 37-acre forest near his childhood home of Sulfur Springs.

Pictured here are the daughters of Sam & Stella Stout,



who, in 1994, stopped the sale of their beloved woods by then owner Purdue Research Foundation. When I first met the Stout sisters in 2002, they were still dedicated to the permanent preservation of their parents' legacy and still disturbed by PRF's willingness to auction this parcel to the highest bidder with no protection or preservation agreement in place.

We quickly devised a plan for Red-tail to hold a permanent conservation easement, which was rejected by PRF. At that time, I took the project to John Bacone, director of the Nature Preserves Division of IDNR, who initiated a drive to have Stout Woods dedicated as a State Nature Preserve, thereby providing the highest level of protection available by this organization. In 2006, his efforts culminated in the woods being dedicated as a State Nature Preserve at a ceremony attended by three generations of the Stout Family.



RLC continued to spend many volunteer hours every year eradicating invasive plants and maintaining the loop trail. This might have been the end of another Red-tail success story. However in 2010, a representative from PRF contacted me and said they intended once again to sell the woods. Fortunately, they offered Red-tail an opportunity to purchase the woods.

That set RLC's land acquisition "wheels in motion", this time resulting in a fund raising initiative fueled by the generosity of the Stout family and friends as well as the Dr. Laura Hare Charitable Trust. In March 2013, we were able to purchase the woods and start a site-specific endowment fund at the Henry County Community Foundation.

In the land conservation business, it pays to be vigilante and flexible, and without hesitation, rise to any worthy challenge. Without the presence of a strong land trust in east central Indiana and dedicated individuals like Randy Jones, this splendid woodland could have become just another field.



Randy Jones and RLC at long last hold title to Randy's childhood playground, Stout Memorial Woodland.

RUTH DUTRO NATURE PRESERVE: Another long-term land acquisition project that hit a milestone this past year is the challenging, complicated urban nature preserve named to honor an educator who had a lasting impression on her many students. This project is funded and guided by generous Red-tail patrons, Geoff and Josephine Fox. Turning a brown-field into a lasting, living nature preserve requires good science and much funding. Geoff and Josie’s dedication to our community and Red-tail Land Conservancy will result in a flourishing, diverse living monument to a beloved educator. At this time, RLC owns half of this 35 acre site and stands ready to see this terribly disturbed site return to its former glory.



Numerous land acquisition projects are currently moving forward due in part to our dedicated staff and board of directors. Fueling this surge of projects is 1) our state which has set aside twenty million dollars, 2) the Lilly Foundation which kicked in an additional ten million, and 3) our local foundations who have pledged to provide the necessary matching funds to purchase and permanently protect natural areas. We are currently creating the complicated process through which we will fund east central Indiana’s share of this windfall. Stand by Red-tail supporters...the future is extremely bright for the land we hold dear.

Outreach

In last year’s annual report I announced our Rebranding Initiative that continues to present our land trust to the public with a much improved, coordinated system of social media, web presence, banners, posters, signage system, logo, and even a new name.



Just in time, our Capacity Expansion Initiative produced the funding to hire our second employee, Kelly Borgmann. Kelly’s skills with social media fit right in with our Rebranding efforts. She has proven most effective in coordinating events, communications, and my favorite, organizing our office. Her “can do” approach to every task makes her a most valuable addition to the Red-tail staff. The current challenge is to continue to expand our staff and find a bigger office to enable our growing land trust reach its potential in the coming years.

All of this effort was just gaining momentum when our land trust was dealt a terrible and potentially crippling blow. Our caretakers at Munsee Woods were arrested for manufacturing and distributing methamphetamines. With one phone call from the sheriff's office, this horrendous social scourge became a Red-tail problem with the potential of blemishing fourteen years of work building credibility and trust in our community.

Instead, with the guidance of our law enforcement agencies and the board of health, we are in the process of decontaminating and demolishing the buildings involved in this saddening breach of trust. Red-tail has once again risen to a challenge and is finding our way through the quagmire of "red tape" necessary to regain our momentum and move our mission forward.

Stewardship

Our stewardship activities remain at the top of RTC's priorities. Our nine nature preserves require hundreds of volunteer hours to keep aggressive non-native species contained and moving toward total eradication as well as our trails maintained. We remain grateful for the many community members who choose to spend their free time performing these rewarding tasks. Our challenge is to increase volunteer participation in the field as our stewardship responsibilities increase.



Volunteers from First Merchants Bank spent the day at RTNP removing bush honeysuckle and having fun in the woods.



Volunteer super-star Riley Carswell helps out an afternoon almost every week.



Neighbors pitch in also...thanks Patti!



Don't forget our board members who volunteer to govern and fund our activities.

In Conclusion

I hit a personal milestone this year by reaching the ripe, old age of sixty-five. I am embracing “old age” and look forward to many more productive years at Red-tail Land Conservancy. However, the current plan is to cut back my hours (and pay) in two and a half years. This brings a sense of urgency to our Capacity Expansion Initiative. We took a good “first step” this year in hiring a part-time Executive Assistant. But a seamless transition calls for an aggressive fund-raising posture that will enable us to hire two full-time directors and attain a larger office to accommodate the growing staff.

This is a huge and complicated undertaking. It will only happen with dedicated board members and patrons, who have an eye to the future of land conservation in east central Indiana. Our past is glorious, and our future has never been brighter. In the terse words of navy petty officers, “TURN TO!”

Respectfully submitted...

For the land,
Barry Banks
Executive Director

