

Sycamore Land Trust hopes to enlarge Trevlac Bluffs preserve: www.heraldtimesonline.com

Group raising funds to add 38 adjacent acres to 200-acre preserve

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A rare and beautiful parcel of land is for sale, some of it steep bluffs hosting native hemlocks, ancient remnants of prehistoric times, and Sycamore Land Trust has first dibs.

The 38 acres is part of Trevlac Bluffs, east of Lake Lemon and just south of Ind. 45 in Brown County, and the land trust already owns 196 adjoining acres.

Asking price: \$183,000, but one generous benefactor has already contributed \$100,000 towards the purchase, and other funding partners, including the Nature Conservancy and the Department of Natural Resources' Heritage Trust license plate fund, have chipped in around \$43,000.

That leaves \$40,000 to raise, although several individuals and groups who attended the group's annual meeting a few weeks ago contributed at least \$2,000, earmarked for the purchase.

"It's really spectacular, with big old, hemlock trees," said John Lawrence, assistant director of the land trust.

"You can sit there and think, 'This is what things looked like thousands of years ago when the glaciers were retreating.' It's a cool spot," he said.

Literally cool, since the bluffs form a curved, north-facing slope.

Hemlocks are a more northerly species, and in a handful of small pockets in Indiana where they remain, they indicate an unusual geologic pattern and a cool microclimate.

SLT's Trevlac Bluffs Nature Preserve is special not only because of the hemlock-covered cliffs, but because it also contains about 100 acres of forest in the floodplain of Beanblossom Creek, including a mile of the creek itself, upstream from Lake Lemon.

The height from the creek to the top of the bluffs is about 200 feet.

"The vista goes forever," said SLT Executive Director Christian Freitag.

"Agreements are in place for the property to become a state-dedicated nature preserve, a designation reserved for the 'best of the best' in Indiana," Freitag said.

"The bluff was carved by Beanblossom Creek, which runs at the base of the cliff. This is the same Beanblossom Creek on which SLT owns the Beanblossom Bottoms (state-dedicated) Nature Preserve in northwestern Monroe County," he said.

The parcel the land trust hopes to add to its existing preserve includes about a quarter of the bluffs and old hemlocks.

The rural tract became available because the landowner died.

"Often, these properties remain in single ownership, or in the same family, for decades or even generations. When they do come up for sale, the opportunity to fill in the hole in the preserve design is critically important," Freitag said. "If it can't be done at that moment, the opportunity may be lost forever. If it's purchased by someone else and they decide to clear cut it or cut down the hemlocks for a pretty view from their house, there's no going back from that."

Freitag said private property immediately east of the parcel for sale had been intensely logged, and while the land trust does not oppose timber harvesting, "that just emphasized how important it is to get this property protected and make it part of the larger preserve design. Contiguity is crucial for habitat, and fragmentation is a big cause of habitat degradation."

Lawrence said a trail crosses the top of the bluffs, but is interrupted by private property.

"Right now, (hiking) access is limited. We would like to improve on that in the future, but there's no time line on that yet," he said. There's also not a good place to park.

Both Lawrence and Freitag said the family trust that inherited the property is generously giving the land trust time to raise the money for the property.

"The family would like to see it preserved, but they also need to get the fair market value for it," Lawrence said.

"There are already a couple houses up on the bluffs, with really nice views," Lawrence said.

"If you don't grab (land for preservation) when you can, things can change."

Protecting trees and landscapes

People often think the way things are now is the natural order of things, said Sycamore Land Trust Executive Director Christian Freitag at the group's annual meeting. But once upon a time in Indiana, 200-year-old sycamore trees 15 feet in diameter were not unusual, he said. Not anymore.

But such ancient and mammoth trees are still possible, Freitag said: Find a 2-year-old sycamore 15 millimeters in diameter and protect it for 200 years.

Sycamore Land Trust's mission is to preserve southern Indiana's disappearing landscape. The nonprofit organization owns 45 parcels totaling 2,359 acres and holds 29 conservation easements covering 3,650 acres for a total of 6,009 acres.

For more information, call 336-5382, donate at www.sycamorelandtrust.org, or mail a check to Sycamore Land Trust, P.O. Box 7801, Bloomington, IN 47407-7801.

Steve Snyder | Herald-Times

Trevlac Bluffs Nature Preserve

