



# Sycamore Land Trust

Media Coverage

News source: The Herald-Times

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Date: 1/1/2017

URL: [http://www.heraldtimesonline.com/life/outdoors/benefits-of-the-trust-bicentennial-nature-trust-s-million-helps/article\\_bb6951aa-765e-5595-8956-ea46c4e63559.html](http://www.heraldtimesonline.com/life/outdoors/benefits-of-the-trust-bicentennial-nature-trust-s-million-helps/article_bb6951aa-765e-5595-8956-ea46c4e63559.html)

## Benefits of the trust: Bicentennial Nature Trust's \$30 million helps agencies acquire thousands of acres across Indiana

Bicentennial Nature Trust's \$30 million helps agencies acquire thousands of acres across state



As the bicentennial year celebrations across Indiana end, so does the Bicentennial Nature Trust, a program announced in 2012 by then-Gov. Mitch Daniels as a way to help conserve and protect land across the Hoosier state.

In all, 129 land acquisitions totaling more than 11,096 acres have been completed. The trust funds included \$20 million approved by the Legislature and \$10 million from the Lilly Endowment. The trust was a project of the Bicentennial Commission, co-chaired by former Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman and former U.S. Representative Lee Hamilton, and was established to honor the state park system, which celebrated 100 years in 2016.

The Bicentennial Nature Trust was different from other land acquisition programs, according to Joe Tutterrow, director of protection for the Indiana chapter of the Nature Conservancy. The trust could be used not only to purchase land for forested areas but also for city parks and other recreational areas. "It was a much broader

reach, and the results show how much it was needed," he said.

“It’s been a great program, and we’re hoping something can follow it,” Tutterrow said.

Using funds from the Bicentennial Nature Trust required a matching donation of land or dollars. The property acquired through the fund had to become part of the public trust to ensure the land was protected for future generations. Partners included city park systems, land trusts, trails groups and land-holding divisions of the Department of Natural Resources. More than 70 percent of the land trust funds were awarded to non-state partners, according to a DNR news release.

The first major donation as part of the trust was a 1,500-acre property near Springville owned by Bloomington’s Steve Ferguson and his family. The land is still s a working farm but is now protected against development forever.

Other acquisitions added land — from a little more than 1 acre to hundreds of acres — to state parks, nature preserves and county park systems.

The Bicentennial Nature Trust helped Sycamore Land Trust acquire 1,711 acres in areas across Indiana. “It’s been hugely helpful to us,” said Abby Perfetti, communications director for Sycamore Land Trust. The funds allowed the land trust to add acres of woodlands and wetlands. Some of those include land adjoining Morgan-Monroe State Forest, an area next to Trevlac Bluffs Nature Preserve in Brown County, land added to the Beanblossom Bottoms State Dedicated Nature Preserve in northern Monroe County and a peninsula of land along Lake Monroe. Another 61 acres in two tracts were added to Scarlet Oak Woods Preserve in Monroe County, tying together more than 200 acres of protected habitat.

“Having a substantial amount of money like this helps us conserve the wildlife habitat corridors,” Perfetti explained. Those corridors give wildlife, from birds to small mammals, large tracts of forest or wetlands where they can find a home year-round or stop during migration.

“It provides more safe space for wildlife,” Perfetti said.

It also helps enlarge areas of hardwood forest, allowing different species of trees to develop in the middle areas of the forest. Those species wouldn’t grow if they were closer to the edge of the woods, Perfetti said.

A large portion of the Sycamore Land Trust acquisitions were focused on the Beanblossom Bottoms area. The funds allowed the land trust to add acres in the protected wetland and forest areas that it couldn’t have acquired on its own. “A legacy project doesn’t come along every day, so this was fantastic,” she said.

The program also allowed Sycamore Land Trust to reach out to new donors, Perfetti said.

What’s next?

Although it’s totally different, the new President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust Fund was the name given to the Indiana Heritage Trust, effective July 1, 2016. The Indiana Heritage Trust began in 1992 to acquire and protect land for natural resources and habitats, as well as for recreational, historical or archeological significance across the state.

That means the President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust is now the engine to fund land acquisitions in Indiana. To use funds from the trust, one of the divisions of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources has to be a sponsor, said Tutterrow. "Generally, that's not much of a challenge," he said, explaining that there are many divisions that could partner with a group to acquire land for trails or wooded areas.

To date, the Indiana Heritage Trust has helped the state and its partner agencies acquire 61,793 acres at 440 sites across Indiana by investing \$49.5 million, according to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources website. Now as the Harrison Conservation Trust, there have been some changes. The new trust streamlines the review and recommendation process for selecting projects. The makeup of the project committee also has been changed; the 10 governor appointees must now represent five geographic regions of the state and come from one or more the following communities: environmental, land trust, organized hunting and fishing, forest products and parks and recreation. The other members of the trust committee will include directors of the state Department of Natural Resources divisions of fish and wildlife, forest, nature preserves, outdoor recreation, state parks, as well as the chief executive officers of the Indiana State Museum and historic sites. Four members of the General Assembly will be nonvoting members of the committee as well.

What concerns Tutterrow and others is the funding level for the trust. Much of the money comes from the environmental license plates that Hoosiers can purchase. But fewer Hoosiers are purchasing the license plates. In 2015, 39,632 of the plates were sold for \$990,800, according to data supplied by the Nature Conservancy. That may seem like a lot of money but in 1999, 76,889 plates were sold for \$1,922,225.

"It doesn't generate as much money anymore," Tutterrow said.

Other funding sources also include appropriations from the General Assembly and donations from patrons.

"The focus now is to find a dedicated funding source" to help the conservation trust, he said. The Nature Conservancy and other groups are working with legislators to find a funding source that would be supported by both Democrats and Republicans in the Statehouse.

"It's a different mission but we all have some common ground," Tutterrow said. "We're hopeful."

It's a sentiment that Perfetti also has. "The money that comes from (environmental license plates) has protected land in our area. It really makes a difference."

Find out more

For more on the Bicentennial Nature Trust, go to [www.in.gov/dnr/7577.htm](http://www.in.gov/dnr/7577.htm), which has a list of 198 approved projects and more.