this land
is your land

2016 Impact Report
Sycamore Land Trust
A Vision of Wilderness

Christian Freitag
Executive Director

Take a moment to imagine a forest so enormous, you could walk for days in any direction and still be surrounded by trees. Think of the wildness, the dense foliage, the living ecosystems teeming with more species than we would have time to discover. In the scope of history, it has only been a moment since Indiana looked like that.

That wilderness seems a world away, but we at Sycamore are visionaries. And together, we are creating the world in which we wish to live. That world starts here at home, in southern Indiana, among the marshes and prairies and cypress groves. From the smallest spring peeper at Beanblossom Bottoms to the towering trees at Scarlet Oak Woods, our goal is to bring the land back to what it wants to be.

“That wilderness seems a world away, but we at Sycamore are visionaries.”

Thankfully, this vision is shared by nearly a thousand Sycamore members -- families, companies, foundations, and individuals. Because of your generosity, and your belief that it is not just possible but imperative that we safeguard nature for future generations, Sycamore has accomplished more than I could have imagined.

To everyone who has stepped up in ways big or small, I am endlessly grateful for your dedication. Please enjoy this summary of the work we did together in 2016. Then, let’s look forward to what our future holds.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

2016 by the Numbers

Numbers can’t tell the whole story, but they can tell a whole lot about how much we accomplished together. Here are some reasons why 2016 was a great year for conservation in southern Indiana:

• Acres protected by Sycamore in 2016: 186
• Value of land protected: $903,500
• Environmental Education participants: 4,121
• Volunteer hours: 1,920
• Miles of hiking trails built: 9
• Public nature preserves opened: 1
• New members: 154

“Sycamore Land Trust -- my favorite nonprofit. I so value all the work Sycamore does adding acres of beautiful southern Indiana land to already-protected preserves. I've hiked quite a few Sycamore trails in the past, but when I received the new Preserve Guide I was amazed to see so many new preserves added! The next day I hiked the new Dilcher-Turner Canyon Forest. There's always a certain feel of inner calm when walking through woods, and I certainly wasn't disappointed. Thanks to Sycamore for all your efforts to preserve these and other properties. Kudos to Christian and the staff for their passion and success!”

Carol Pettys
Member since 2011, retired teacher, Leadership Society member
A Love of the Woods

Lindsay and Loren Wood have made connections to Sycamore in just about every way possible. They hike our public nature preserves regularly, they have been members for years, their business Loren Wood Builders has provided in-kind support, and Lindsay recently joined Sycamore’s board of directors. Why would a busy couple with three young children and a business to run make the time to contribute so much to one cause?

“I’ve always felt really strongly about conservation and preservation as one of the most effective means of stewarding our natural environment,” explains Lindsay. This simple belief guides the way the family members live their lives every day.

Mirroring the ways Lindsay and Loren grew up playing outside and using their imaginations, the couple is raising their children to be good stewards of nature. They value giving kids time to explore the outdoors unsupervised. The creek running through the Woods’ backyard, the trail around their property, and the chicken coop the kids help care for are all a part of that effort to disconnect from screens and reconnect with nature in every season.

Another part of that lifestyle is supporting causes that protect the environment for future generations. Sycamore has always been important to the Woods, ever since Loren started donating $20 a year as a college student. Realizing that it was an emotional decision at the beginning, he simply felt that if he valued the natural environment, he needed to be a part of its protection and preservation.

Now as a builder, Loren is aware of the impact development can have on the land. Knowing the power of a bulldozer makes nature seem more fragile. But he uses that knowledge as an opportunity to “have an equal and positive impact” by giving back to Sycamore.

“The threat of not preserving a piece of land seems very real to me,” Loren shares, going on to explain how preserving land locally is that much more satisfying. “You see the impact locally. You know that piece of land is going to be open and accessible and undeveloped forever.”

“It’s been quite a magical experience having the opportunity to work with Sycamore Land Trust and their dedicated team. The mission of Sycamore resonated so well with myself and our team at Blueline. It is organizations like Sycamore that create adventure and show the beauty of what Indiana is truly about. By far one of my favorite groups in town to support, collaborate with, and be an honored member of.”

Chelsea Sanders
Trail runner, adventurer, and Founder of Blueline (see their videos on our website!)

Photo by Holland Colvin at the Amy Weingartner Branigin Peninsula Preserve
Habitat saved: 2016 acquisitions & openings

Amy Weingartner Branigin Peninsula Preserve

This preserve on Lake Monroe opened in December 2016. It includes habitat for bald eagles and other birds, a hilly hike, and breathtaking views of the lake. Sycamore purchased three parcels in 2015 and 2016 through the generosity of the Branigin, Weingartner, Jarvis, and Seeber families; the Indiana Bicentennial Nature Trust; the Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County; and Sycamore members. In 2016, we built a parking lot with the support of Loren Wood Builders and the Hoosier Hikers Council built a trail.

Photo: Barred owl by Jennifer French

Scarlet Oak Woods

Three families -- Bill and Loraine Hanna (pictured here), George Bull and Faye Mark, and an anonymous couple -- made bargain sale donations on a total of 63 acres, which were matched by the Bicentennial Nature Trust. This adds migratory songbird habitat to Sycamore’s Scarlet Oak Woods in northern Monroe County, expanding a large block of contiguous forest that connects to Morgan-Monroe State Forest and Mt. Gilead Friends Retreat.

Laura Hare Tract, Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge

Thanks to support from the Laura Hare Charitable Trust and Sycamore members, Sycamore was able to protect a special grassland and forest that was added to the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge in Gibson and Pike Counties. This 108-acre addition protects a large block of excellent habitat for threatened species like bobcats and American woodcocks. It also connects to the 1,043-acre Columbia Mine Preserve, which Sycamore purchased in 2012.

The background photo was taken by our friend Richard Vernier at the Laura Hare Tract last spring, showing the trees in full bloom. We encourage you to visit the Refuge, hike the miles of trails, and enjoy this fine example of success in conservation! Without our partners at the DNR, the Laura Hare Charitable Trust, and beyond, a project on this scale would not be possible.

“When I happened upon Sycamore Land Trust, I immediately identified with the symbol – a sycamore, my favorite tree – and what you all stood for. As someone once told me: land, it’s the only thing they don’t make more of!”

Jamey Brooks
Sycamore member since 2012

Dan Efroymson Preserve, Beanblossom Creek

In the Beanblossom Creek Bicentennial Conservation Area in Monroe County, Sycamore acquired three more parcels of sensitive floodplain totaling 112 acres. Together they form the Dan Efroymson Preserve, named in thanks for the Efroymson Family Fund’s support of the Beanblossom project. This area, which is not yet open to the public, contains more than a half mile of the creek and has another mile of creek frontage. Along with the neighboring Sam Shine Foundation Preserve, Sycamore has preserved 450 contiguous acres at this location downstream from our Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve.
Learning in the great outdoors

Environmental Education is an important part of connecting people to nature. The impacts reach far into the future, because when you learn to love nature at a young age, you embrace your role in protecting it. Highlights from 2016 include:

- Taught 4,121 participants in schools and outdoor programs
- Launched our Native Pollinators Program, funded by a grant from the Duke Energy Foundation
- Recognized as a 2016 Community Partner by Monroe County Community School Corporation for 90+ hours of educational programming during the 2015-16 school year
- Collaborated with Indiana University School of Education Teach session for each section of the Elementary Science Methods class
- Partnered with Heth-Washington Elementary in Harrison County to incorporate nature-based lessons and play, and enhance the natural areas of the schoolgrounds
- Became a Community STEM partner with Grandview Elementary in Bloomington
- Earned a grant from Brown County Soil & Water Conservation District in partnership with Helmsburg Elementary for pollinator garden outside science classroom
- Forged ongoing classroom partnerships with Evansville Community Schools and Evansville Montessori School
- Hosted 22 public hiking/educational events for children and adults

“We do a lot of teaching the factual things. But the experiential learning is what really sticks with them.”

Mike Love
2nd-grade teacher at Rogers Elementary and long-term partner with Sycamore’s education program

Stewards of our home

Nature is resilient. Give the plants, animals, bugs, fungi, and waterways a chance to survive, and they’ll thrive. Our land stewardship seeks to help nature return to “what it wants to be” and connect people to nature, and we couldn’t do that without our volunteers at preserves and in the office.

The Hoosier Hikers Council made great progress at the Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill, clearing and benching more than two miles of trail in the preserve’s scenic, steep hills. We aim to complete the entire loop in 2017.

The HHC also helped with a new 0.3-mile loop trail at the Porter West Preserve, and made trail improvements at the Cedars Preserve, Dilcher-Turner Canyon Forest, and the Dishman and Hopper Quarries Preserve.

Volunteers also helped with habitat restoration, removing invasive plants at several Sycamore preserves throughout the year:

- Asian bush honeysuckle at the Porter West Preserve, funded by the Monroe County Soil and Water Conservation District and Eco Logic
- Garlic mustard at Porter West, Touch the Earth Natural Area, and Trevlac Bluffs
- At Trevlac Bluffs Nature Preserve, Habitat Solutions began a three-year project to control dozens of acres of multiflora rose and other invasives, funded by an Environmental Quality Incentives Program grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and including a substantial donation of herbicide from Habitat Solutions.

Photo: The Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill
Financial health

Sycamore’s promise of forever must be grounded in solid finances. We are pleased to openly share our organization’s stability through financial data, and you can learn more by reading our IRS Form 990 returns at www.sycamorelandtrust.org/financial-info. If you have questions, please contact us at 812-336-5382 ext 100.

Because longevity is so important to protecting land, we focus on building the membership base through contributions and grants, and growing Sycamore’s endowments to provide long-term stability for our land protection and environmental education work. This is how we build lasting security, allowing us to protect the land for which we are responsible, connect people to nature, and plan for a productive future.

Net Worth

- Land: $9,000,395
- Investments & Endowments: $2,227,339
- Operating Funds: $1,186,565
- Buildings & Equipment: $594,228
TOTAL: $13,008,527

Income

- Contributions & Memberships: $1,550,662 (62%)
- Non-Cash Contributions: $669,500 (27%)
- Government Grants: $184,766 (7%)
- Other Income: $88,298 (4%)
- Investment Income: $10,020 (<1%)
TOTAL: $2,503,246

Expenses

- Program Services: $390,681 (65%)
- Management & General: $150,816 (25%)
- Fundraising: $63,593 (10%)
TOTAL: $605,090

We are so grateful to our donors for making these successes possible! To see a list of 2016 donors, please visit www.sycamorelandtrust.org/impact.

“Perhaps the best way to prepare for environmental change is to preserve land, and Sycamore Land Trust’s accomplishments in land preservation are extraordinary. Sycamore’s ability to attract donors and supporters is based on respect for all by providing property owners the opportunity to convey their property, while also giving the plants, animals, and microbes that live on the land the ongoing opportunity to create offspring, fertilize the soil, store carbon, and offer beauty and relief to visitors. Count me as a dedicated supporter of Sycamore.”

Ellen Ketterson
Distinguished Professor of Biology and Gender Studies, Indiana University
Sycamore Leadership Society member since 1999

Photo: Southern leopard frog at the Sam Shine Foundation Preserve

“I have always been partial to the rolling hills and forests of southern Indiana, and am thankful Sycamore is committed to protecting places in this landscape.”

Will Ditzler, a member of Sycamore’s Legacy Circle, standing on the 50-acre wetland property he built adjacent to a Sycamore preserve in Lawrence County. Will has generously donated this land to Sycamore in his will, expanding our protected land there to 130 acres.
front cover photo by Danielle Lucas, Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve
back cover photo by Dottie Warmbier, Weekday Walkers at Yellowwood Farm