In the late 1800s, naturalist Robert Ridgway described the Lower Wabash Valley and photographed some of the magnificent trees still to be found there. His photographs and a letter describing them were sent to his colleague Charles C. Deam in 1919.

Ridgway writes:

“Yes, although I have not been in Indiana on foot since 1890, I know that my old ‘stamping grounds’ have been completely transformed. In truth, it was knowledge of this fact, more than anything else, which induced me to establish my home here (Olney, IL) rather than at Mt. Carmel where I was born. The transformation is indeed more radical than could possibly be realized by anyone not familiar with the forests of the Wabash bottom as I knew them in the ‘seventies.’ Then there was scarcely a break from a little below Vincennes to near New Harmony, an exceedingly heavy virgin forest, some of the heaviest hardwood forest I have ever seen, covering almost the entire flood plain of the Wabash on the Indiana side. I am sending you some photographs, taken as late as 1888, showing the continuous character of those forests, though at the time the photographs were taken there had been considerable ‘culling’ of the best trees.”

“When it is considered that in the bottomland of the Lower Wabash all the conditions existed - deep, fertile, well-drained soils, with constant moisture, for the very best development of tree growth and that the stand (in the original forest) was so thick that the trees had to grow upward toward the sunlight, it is no wonder that many species grew to a height that seems impossible to some people. My estimate was that the tree top line of the virgin forest along the Lower Wabash was not less than 100 feet and it may have been as much as 120 feet. It was remarkably uniform, forming a practically straight, level line, with only here and there the dome-shaped top of some species which grew larger than most others, usually a sycamore, pecan, a Schneck’s Oak, or tulip tree, lifted a little above the general level. One hundred feet high seems a marvelous height to many people; yet it is a fact that it doesn’t take very much of a tree to reach that height in a crowded forest.”

On the Cover

In 1928, this huge sycamore was one of many measured in Gibson County in the Wabash River Bottom and was part of a heavily stocked hardwood forest. How big do you suppose a sycamore can grow in southern Indiana? This one measured 15 x 10 feet in diameter, was 160 feet in height, and its top spread measured 134 x 112 feet. Our sycamores rivaled sequoias in their majesty. You know how you get a 200-year-old sycamore tree that’s 15 feet across? You start with a 2-year-old tree that’s 15 millimeters across. AND THEN YOU PROTECT IT.
Robert Ridgway, an American ornithologist, was born in Mount Carmel, Illinois in 1850. His interest in ornithology began at an early age as he observed and drew birds near his home. He struck up a correspondence with Spencer Baird, the assistant secretary at the Smithsonian Institute, who allowed Ridgway to come work with him—with a rent-free dormitory room as his only compensation. In 1874, Ridgway was appointed Smithsonian ornithologist and after Baird’s death in 1887, assumed his role as America’s leading professional ornithologist. Though Ridgway had only a high school education and an honorary master’s degree in science from Indiana University (as a sign of gratitude for supplying the university with bird specimens after their museum burned down), he was articulate and served as the Smithsonian’s representative for many years.

Ridgway wrote a monumental 6,000-page series of volumes on The Birds of North and Middle America. He also published one of the first and most important color systems for bird identification. Ornithologists all over the world continue to consult Ridgway’s color studies and books.

Charles C. Deam was appointed as the first State Forester of Indiana in 1909. Here he is seen with his traveling botany lab.

Charles Deam was born in 1865 near Bluffton, Indiana. As a young man, he overworked himself in his pharmacy and developed health problems, so his doctor advised him to take long walks outdoors to relax. Little did the doctor know this would lead Deam to a passion more consuming than his drug store business. He developed a strong interest in botany and his “long walks” eventually took him to every township in Indiana to collect plant specimens. Deam served as Indiana’s first state forester (1909-1913) and authored books that are still referenced today, including Trees of Indiana (1911), Shrubs of Indiana (1924), Grasses of Indiana (1929) and Flora of Indiana (1940).
In December, SLT worked with our board member Mike Baker and his wife Bev to permanently protect 55 acres adjacent to the already-protected 500+ acres at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve in Monroe County. The Bakers have resided on this property for over 30 years, purchasing additional land next to their home as it became available. The property contains a diverse mix of mature upland and bottomland forest, forest edge, and open fields. Several rare species of state and regional concern can be found in the area, including the cerulean warbler, worm-eating warbler, hooded warbler, red-shouldered hawk, and broad-winged hawk. The Bakers will continue to enjoy horseback riding in the fields and hiking in the woods, knowing that the property will be monitored by SLT and remain unspoiled forever.

The 200-acre Trevlac Bluffs Nature Preserve in Brown County came under SLT’s ownership and management in October through a cooperative agreement with The Nature Conservancy and the Indiana Heritage Trust. The preserve is named for its towering 200-foot bluff over Beanblossom Creek that is home to a rare stand of native eastern hemlock trees, one of only about twenty such stands in Indiana. The stands are remnants of the cooler early post-glacial climate of thousands of years ago. The Trevlac Bluffs Nature Preserve includes the 38-acre Mary Louise Sutphin Tract and the Young Preserve, which was previously donated to SLT by Virginia Young of Franklin. This 2-acre woods was the last remaining parcel of the farm that had been owned by Ms. Young’s family for decades, and it fills an important gap in the preserve complex. The preserve also protects over 100 acres of forested wetlands in the floodplain of Beanblossom Creek and over a mile of the creek itself, which is the main input for Lake Lemon about a mile and a half downstream. The property will be dedicated as an Indiana State Nature Preserve by the Department of Natural Resources, in recognition of the statewide significance of the natural communities preserved there.

Joseph and Bonnie Garrity of Galena, Illinois worked with SLT to permanently protect a 50-acre wooded property in southern Indiana that has been in Bonnie’s family since the mid-19th century. Bonnie traced the ownership history back to the first European settlers who homesteaded there in 1839. Acquiring the property in 1844, several generations of her family have lived and farmed on the property since then. Bonnie believes the property was once used by Native Americans prior to European settlement, as she found a mano stone (a smooth stone used for grinding) in the 1970’s, and her father discovered several stone projectile points in an adjacent field during his youth. The mano stone was found near a natural spring known as Rattlesnake Spring. True to its namesake, state endangered timber rattlesnakes were historically found on the property near the spring, and many other threatened species use the habitat including the cerulean warbler, worm-eating warbler, hooded warbler, Kentucky warbler, red-shouldered hawk, broad-winged hawk, whip-or-will, red-headed woodpecker, and wood thrush. The Garritys will continue to use the land for hunting, hiking, and camping, and the terms of the easement will allow timber stand improvement and timbering to promote forest health and proper maintenance of an oak/hickory forest to benefit wildlife.
Caprile Farmstead
Goat Cheeses
Conservation Easement

Known both nationally and internationally for their hand-made fresh, ripened, and aged chevres, Caprile Farmstead Goat Cheeses got its start when Judy and Larry Schad purchased an abandoned southern Indiana hill farm in 1976. The 80-acre farm had seen better times—the original house had burned to its foundation, leaving just an old barn and some dilapidated outbuildings. Nevertheless, the land spoke to them. Running the property title revealed that Larry’s great, great grandfather had owned the land from 1856 until 1910. After this serendipitous discovery, the Schads fully embraced the property with all of its beautiful hills, woods, and streams. They relocated two 1800s log cabins and re-erected them over the old foundation, and began the process of restoring the farm to a working state.

Now the last working dairy in Floyd County, Caprile Farmstead chose to work with SLT to forever protect the natural values of the land while retaining the right to continue complimentary uses such as forest management and maintaining the existing open areas by cutting hay and pasturing livestock. The farm contains a mix of upland forest, forest edge, open field, and caves, providing habitat for a wide range of native plants and animals, including several rare species of state and regional concern such as the little brown bat and the tri-colored bat. Certified Humane by the Humane Farm Animal Care group in 2009 (with no need to adjust management or procedures that had already been in place for over 20 years), the Caprile Farmstead represents a successful sustainable lifestyle model that emphasizes the necessity of a good working relationship between people and land.

Sycamore Land Trust began two new major habitat restoration projects in 2011. At the Touch the Earth Natural Area near Columbus, SLT received cost assistance from the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) to control a large amount of non-native bushes on the preserve. Nearly half of the 90-acre property was dominated by autumn olive (Elaeagnus umbellata), privet (Ligustrum spp.), Asian bush honeysuckle (Lonicera maackii), and other invasive bushes that crowd out beneficial native plants. Local contractor Habitat Solutions is performing the control work, and is also donating their materials for the three-year project.

The second project was a wetland forest restoration at the Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve, north of Bloomington. About half of the 20-acre Greico parcel was overrun by a solid stand of non-native reed canarygrass (Phalaris arundinacea), an invader that can take over wetlands and exclude native species. Three years of reed canarygrass control will be followed by a native tree planting to reforest the site. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, The Duke Energy Foundation, and The Vectren Foundation are funding the project, which is being completed by Eco Logic of Bloomington.

Also at the Beanblossom Bottoms, Eco Logic performed the second of three years of reed canarygrass control in the state-dedicated nature preserve section of the property, a separate project begun in 2010. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program funded this project as well, along with the Dr. Laura Hare Charitable Foundation. Volunteers assisted the restoration project on two workdays by collecting seeds from native wildflowers, sedges, and rushes at the preserve. The seeds will be used to replant the areas cleared of reed canarygrass.

Volunteers helped with several more projects throughout the year at several properties. In the late winter and again in the fall, volunteers helped maintain the hiking trail at the Cedar Preserve near Harrodsburg. As part of the United Way’s day of caring, a group from Old National Bank cleared a new trail at the Porter West Preserve in western Monroe County and picked up a large amount of roadside trash along State Road 48 and Vernal Pike. Volunteers also pitched in to help year-round volunteer stewards Lisa and Kurt Weisner maintain the trails and the prairie area at Touch the Earth.
2011 Environmental Education Highlights

- At Edgewood Intermediate School, Judy Morran’s 4th grade class continues work on the Well Site preserve, featuring a native prairie and nature trail. This site is dedicated by the town of Ellettsville for permanent protection as an educational natural area.

- Bedford-North Lawrence High School teamed with Earth Force, GM Powertrain and SLT to do water quality studies on Leatherwood Creek east of Bedford.

- The deck and seating project for the outdoor lab at Fayetteville Elementary was completed. The school received the Indiana Tree Farm Award for their outstanding lab.

- For the second year we conducted lectures and workshops at the IU School of Education, inspiring young teachers to use the outdoor setting.

- The gifted and talented program at Burris Elementary in Mitchell has been with us since we started. We do map and compass, computer microscopes, forest studies, karst, and geology with 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders.

- Bloomington’s New Tech High School once again worked with the Trevlac and Beanblossom Bottoms properties doing watershed analysis. This adds to our database of water quality at both sites.

- Our “Lil Hikers” club proved very popular again this year, with many families bringing children of all ages to our special family hikes at Yellowwood Farm, The Hoosier National Forest, and Fish Creek Preserve.

- Bedford Parks hosted a very successful Forest Fun Day. Over 100 people attended. SLT organized the concepts and activities.

- Partnering with Bloomington Parks and Recreation again for the 4th year brought in all MCCSC 6th graders to Leonard Springs Nature Park for days of learning about caves, wildlife, and water. We also helped with their Griffy Lake Nature Days program for 4th graders. These two programs reach some 1000 kids!

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- Our “Lil Hikers” club proved very popular again this year, with many families bringing children of all ages to our special family hikes at Yellowwood Farm, The Hoosier National Forest, and Fish Creek Preserve.

- SLT assisted at the large “Kids Unplugged” day held by the Hoosier National Forest. Over 150 kids participated in this annual event.

- Other SLT Environmental Education activities conducted included Tree Identification workshops, Botanizing the Bottom, Frogs and Rails, wildflower hikes, and our once again popular “Just For Kids” photography workshop in Brown County.

2011 SLT Awards

- The Barbara J. Restle Lifetime Conservation Award was given to Scott Russell Sanders, author of A Conservationist Manifesto (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2009). Sanders, a longtime professor of English at Indiana University, has been a lifetime laureate for the beauty and power of nature, inspiring thousands of people to see, hear, and feel differently about the natural world.

- The Conservation Business of the Year Award was presented to FARMbloomington restaurant and its owner, Chef Daniel Orr. Orr grew up in Columbus, Indiana, and was first inspired to love nature and its bounty from his parents, Tom and Mary Lu. After working in kitchens across the globe, Orr returned to southern Indiana to open FARM, focusing on fresh and local ingredients, many of which are still grown on the family homestead. FARM goes even further, setting a standard for composting food waste, recycling, and supporting local sustainability projects.
Sycamore Land Trust relies on the hard work and expertise of our generous volunteers to accomplish our mission.

In 2011, we were privileged to have 191 volunteers dedicate 843 hours of their time to our mission. Thank you, volunteers! We couldn’t do it without you.

Financial Data for Fiscal Year 2011 (July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011)

Income $410,844 Expenses $337,083

Programs $208,316 (62%)
Management $68,006 (20%)
Fundraising and Outreach $60,761 (18%)

Fundraising and Outreach $60,761 (18%)
Membership and other gifts $357,073 (87%)
Investments and Rental $11,744 (3%)

Remaining assets were invested in stewardship endowment, legal defense fund, operating reserve, and interest-bearing investments.

We’d like to express our gratitude for the hard work and dedication of John Gallman, President Emeritus of our Board of Directors. John joined our board in 2001 and became president in 2004, serving in this role through the end of 2011. Thank you for all you have done for SLT and land conservation in southern Indiana!

Thank you to everyone who works with Sycamore Land Trust to permanently protect the places in southern Indiana that make our region special.

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