Sycamore Land Trust

THE TWIG

THE TRAILS ISSUE // WINTER–SPRING 2021

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BY EVA LAPP, COMMUNICATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT FELLOW

A YEAR IN TRAILS

SYCAMORE'S 2020 TRAIL SURVEY RESULTS

In March of last year, Sycamore launched our first-ever trail survey. After posting information at each of our 16 public nature preserves, we began collecting feedback from preserve visitors about their visits, including how often they visit trails, where they go for hikes, why they are drawn to the outdoors, and what they know about Sycamore.

Since its launch, we have collected 384 responses from individuals or groups, amounting to 974 individual visitors at 9 of our 16 public nature preserves. Here is a brief overview of some of the findings from our surveys, and keep an eye out for comments from preserve visitors throughout this issue!

We are so grateful to everyone who filled out our trail survey this year! We will be continuing to collect feedback through our trail survey and preserve visitor logs.

Look for visitor feedback scattered throughout the issue, noted by the trails icon.

TOP REASONS FOR VISITING SYCAMORE PRESERVES:

- Just to be in nature
- Nature observation
- Fun/recreation
- Exercise/fitness
- Type of landscape (wetlands, wooded bluff, prairie, etc.)

"[I've] lived here all my life and have never walked this trail, but loved it and will come often. Thank you!"

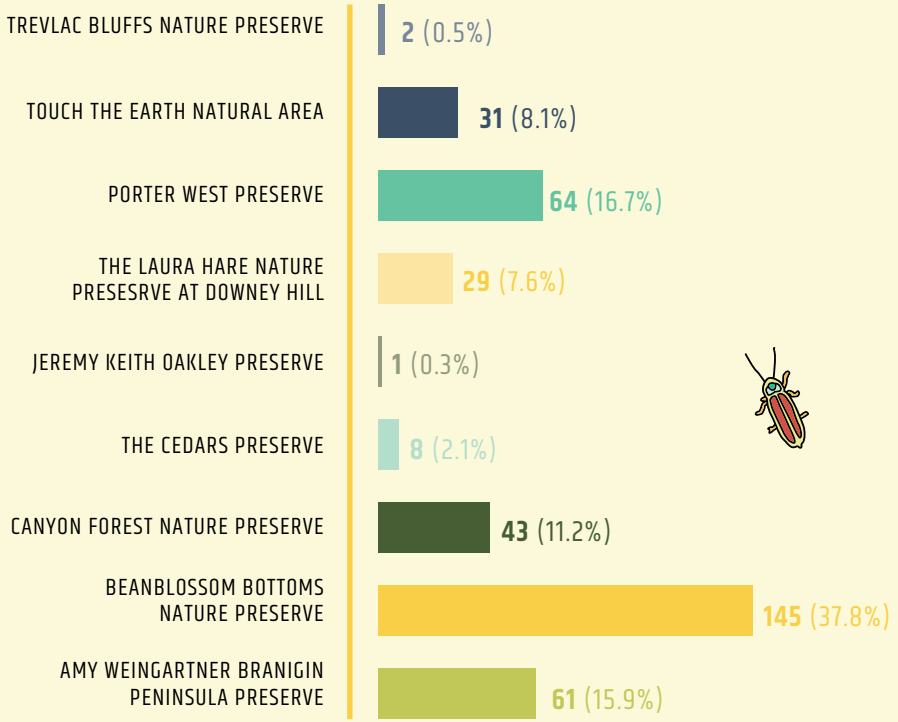
ON THE COVER

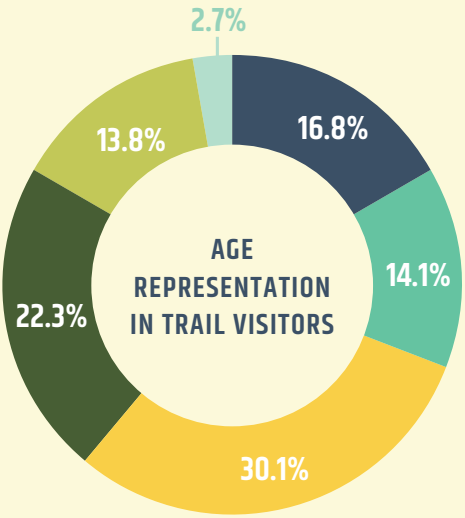
Volunteers with the Hoosier Hikers Council spend a snowy afternoon last December building the new trail reroute at Tangeman Woods. | Ellen Bergan

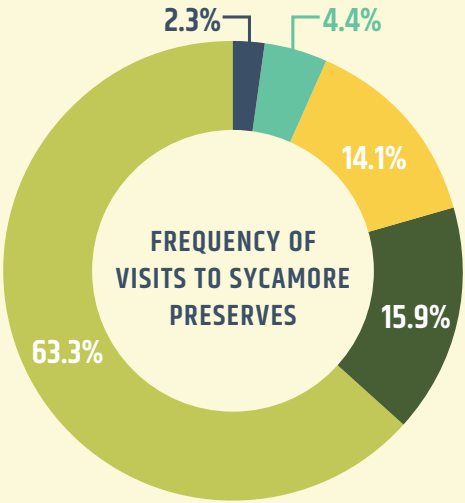
"I visited Beanblossom Bottoms today and was blown away!!! What incredible trails with so many different ecosystems. I can tell a lot of hard work has gone into keeping it looking beautiful!"

384
TOTAL SURVEY RESPONSES

NUMBER OF TRAIL SURVEY RESPONSES AT SYCAMORE PRESERVES







Over the past year, Sycamore preserve visitors were able to experience and explore new outdoor spaces. As shown in the chart to the right, 63.3% of trail survey respondents reported being first-time visitors at a preserve.

"Thank you so much for the work you have done at Sycamore Land Trust. It's been a true gift during the pandemic and I love your mission."

Pin flags line the route of an in-progress trail. | Jim Shearn

TO BUILD

On the day of Sycamore's 30th birthday celebration this past November, I ventured to our Trevlac Bluffs Nature Preserve in Brown County. As I followed the preserve's upper Yellowwood Trail through its mixed hardwood forest and along the rugged bluff of eastern hemlocks, I found myself appreciating not only the scenic vistas of the preserve, but characteristics of the trail itself.

Perhaps this shift in focus was incited by the reflective nature of Sycamore's birthday, or simply by the stewardship mindset my work has inevitably wired into my brain. Regardless of the reason, my focus was drawn towards the small intricacies that defined the trail: The strategic placement of blazes on trees, always ensuring that the next white mark was just within sight; the gentle curve of the path as it followed the land's contours, its switchback weaving down a hillside and dipping over a creek bed.

Sycamore currently has over 30 miles of trails throughout our preserves that span across southern Indiana. Since the onset of COVID-19, our trails have seen a significant increase in use, and responses to our trail surveys indicate how important

A TRAIL

BY ELLEN BERGAN, LAND STEWARDSHIP ASSISTANT

these trails have been to people during this difficult time. Even with their significant role in our outdoor accessibility, it's often hard to conceptualize the immense amount of work that goes into trail creation and upkeep.

ROUTING

The process of building an enriching, long-lasting trail begins with the land itself. Before we can break out any rakes or shovels, we need to determine the route the trail will take through the area. While this decision involves a multitude

Sycamore and Hoosier Hikers Council volunteers work on the Yellowwood Trail reroute at our Trevlac Bluffs Nature Preserve in 2018.

Hoosier Hikers Council volunteers clear the treadway for the trail at Downey Hill in 2014. | Pete Banta

of considerations and logistical factors, Pete Banta of the Hoosier Hikers Council sums it best:

"The best hiking trails encourage people to stay on them and water to stay off them."

When scouting potential trail routes, we look for ways to incorporate interesting features of the landscape that visitors would want to encounter, all while avoiding roads, property boundaries, and potential hazards. At the same time, trails are routed to follow the sides of hills and ridges, making it flatter and easier to walk on. If the trail will pass over ravines or creeks, we look for easy crossings to reduce the need for infrastructure that would require further maintenance.

Incorporating drainage features is essential to the longevity of the trail; allowing the trail to dip and curve lets water flow downhill and mitigates erosion, while also creating a more dynamic hike. With all of these considerations in mind, we flag the general route, walk it again for modifications, and then put up pin flags that follow the topographic contour of the route.

BUILDING

Once the route has been identified and flagged, trail building can begin. Depending on the length and terrain of the trail, this construction process can last several years. Sycamore's six-mile trail at the Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill, built by hard-working members of the Hoosier Hikers Council, took three and a half years to complete. No matter its duration, there are foundational steps that one must take in order to make a well-built trail:

- **Following the pin flags, clear a treadway of shoulder width**
  - Trim vegetation and bushes
  - Remove fallen branches, leaf litter, and duff (other types of decaying organic matter) with fire rakes

"Thank you for your work. During this pandemic, getting out to your preserves has been monumental to our stability. We are so grateful for your efforts and the access we have to your work during this time."

- **Cut and shape a level surface with an arsenal of handy tools**
  - Recommended gear: shovels, field hoes, McLeods (rakehoe), and Pulaskis (axe-like cutting tool)
  - Lessen steep gradients by cutting the trail back and forth up a slope, known as switchbacking
  - Create a level hillside tread by "benching," or digging the trail into the hillside itself
  - Build in drainage features that will shed water, such as waterbars
- **Install blazing and signage in places easily noticed by visitors**

MAINTAINING

Once the trail has been completed, however, the work is far from over. In the wise words of Chris Fox, Sycamore's Land Stewardship Manager:

"Like a vehicle, without proper maintenance, even the best built trail will eventually become a problem."

Maintaining a trail means making sure that all components of the path are kept in good condition. Trails need to be cleared of obstructions that can impede its walkability. Paths are regularly mowed or trimmed during the growing season to clear encroaching vegetation, and fallen trees or branches often need to be removed. While most of these arboreal obstructions can be easily moved to the side of the

A Hoosier Hikers Council volunteer benches a section of the new trail route at Tangeman Woods. | Chris Fox

Land Preservation Director Rob McCrea helps clear a fallen cherry tree from the trail at our Cedars Preserve.

trail, many still require us to haul out a chainsaw to help with clean up. Occasionally, more significant repairs are required to ensure the treadway stays in good shape, such as fixing an erosion issue or repairing a footbridge.

There's also maintenance to make sure navigational signage stays clear and easy to read. Trail blazes that help hikers stay on the path, either through paint splashes or arrow markers, need to be checked on. Additional trail signage might need to be installed, such as the new "You Are Here" location signs that were put up at several of our preserves this past fall.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned from stewardship is to, above all, be flexible and expect daily changes to our plans. The process of packing up all our tools, hiking the trails with our gear in tow, and completing regular maintenance tasks can take a lot of time. We often need to rearrange our schedules when an unexpected trail maintenance issue arises. Some maintenance projects can be much bigger in scope as well. The June 2019 tornado that hit Beanblossom Bottoms required several months of boardwalk repairs and a complete change to our stewardship plans for that summer.

Land Stewardship staff Chris Fox and Ellen Bergan install new trail signs at the Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill.

SUSTAINING

Trail work is arduous, time-consuming, and really sweaty. But, we know that the work is worth it. Trails are our way of connecting people to nature and to the mission of Sycamore Land Trust. This past year in particular, we have all become more aware than ever of how important access to natural areas is to our physical and mental health.

However, Sycamore's trail system would not be possible without the support of dedicated volunteers — from volunteer land stewards that monitor our trails and preserves, to Sycamore's Trail Ranger group that tackles more complicated trail improvements, to the Hoosier Hikers Council that has built several of Sycamore's trail systems. We are also incredibly thankful for the donors whose contributions support our land stewardship work.

Trails are hard work, but they reflect the care that we all share for our environment and for each other. Every trail is the result of a complex, continuous effort to ensure that we can continue to experience the natural landscape around us. Recognizing the work behind our trails can lead us to be more perceptive hikers, dedicated stewards, and appreciative of those who help sustain the paths they take us on.

Fresh snow covers the trail at the Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill.

INTERESTED IN HELPING WITH TRAIL WORK?

The **Hoosier Hikers Council** is an all-volunteer organization that has been building, maintaining, and promoting natural surface hiking trails in Indiana since 1995. Visit their website hoosierhikerscouncil.org for the most recent updates on volunteer opportunities, or email hoosierhikerscouncil@gmail.com.

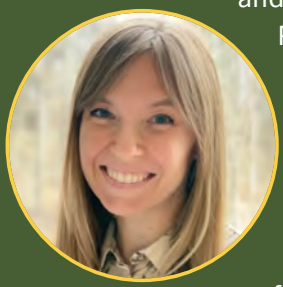
Sycamore Land Trust has multiple volunteer stewardship opportunities. Attend future volunteer workdays, become a Trail Ranger or Preserve Steward, or sign up your group for a special work day at a nature preserve. Find updates on opportunities at sycamorelandtrust.org/volunteer, or email chris@sycamorelandtrust.org.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Sycamore Friends,

Thank you to all our members, volunteers, board, and staff for making Sycamore Land Trust's 30th anniversary in 2020 another successful year of local land conservation and environmental education. While we missed seeing everyone at an in-person Annual Celebration, we celebrated together through our online 30th Birthday Party. In case you missed the party and all the stories that our early founders recorded for the occasion, you can watch them at www.youtube.com/user/SycamoreLandTrust.

As we begin Sycamore's 31st year, I'm excited that Kate Hammel has joined the Sycamore team as our new Communications and Membership Director. Kate is a nature enthusiast with 15 years of communications and non-profit experience. Most recently, she was the Executive Director of the Heart of the City Farmers' Market and Food Access Program in San Francisco for 10 years. Kate's husband Kirby is originally from Indiana, and they've been living in Bloomington with their young daughter Ember for the past two years. They've enjoyed hiking at Sycamore's nature preserves and other local natural areas, and have become "self-proclaimed Garlic Mustard Warriors."



KATE HAMMEL

Many families have been spending much more time outside in the last year, and Sycamore's public nature preserves have been seeing significantly more visitors. In this issue of *The Twig*, we're highlighting all the effort that goes into planning, building, and maintaining our trails, which are open to the public for free. The Hoosier Hikers Council and our other trail volunteers support our staff with countless hours of hard labor, and Sycamore's donors allow us to pay for gravel, lumber, signs, and many other expenses. It's a team effort, which relies on your support.

Thank you for allowing Sycamore to protect and provide public access to these special natural places!

John Lawrence
Executive Director,
Sycamore Land Trust

Your ongoing support helps us continue to protect habitat and connect people to nature in southern Indiana.

YOU CAN RENEW YOUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP ONLINE AT

SYCAMORELANDTRUST.ORG/DONATE

LET YOUR LEGACY SHINE ON FUTURE GENERATIONS.

You can help preserve nature and restore habitat for future generations.

Consider a planned gift to Sycamore Land Trust in your will or estate plan.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT
sycamorelandtrust.org/legacy

OR CONTACT
Ann Connors, Development Director
ann@sycamorelandtrust.org
812-336-5382 ext 104

SANCTUARIES *in* SOUTHERN INDIANA

BY RABBI BRIAN BESSER

A Faith-Based View of Sycamore's Work

Nature is my oldest, deepest source of spiritual renewal. I fell in love with hiking in the Green Mountains of Vermont, where I spent all my childhood summers. In 1988, I trekked 2600 miles from Mexico to Canada on the Pacific Crest Trail through the High Sierra and Cascades. I used to travel far and wide to explore on foot some of the grandest landscapes on Earth—including the glaciers of Iceland, the volcanoes of the Andes, and South Africa's vast, untamed beaches.

When I moved to Indiana eight years ago, I wondered: "how will I ever find inspiration from such ho-hum terrain?" Then, walking through a local preserve in late March, I happened upon a hillside covered with white trillium in full bloom, and I realized anew that transcendence is not confined to mountain summits and ocean expanses. As the prophet proclaims: "the entire world is filled with God's glory." (Isaiah 6:3) One doesn't have to cross the globe to exult

in God's Creation. I have come to appreciate the subtle and restful beauty of a quiet walk in the woods of Southern Indiana.

Notwithstanding its undeniable challenges, COVID has brought some unexpected gifts. Deprived of our usual outlets for sports, recreation and indoor entertainment, we are prompted toward the one safe venue for socializing: the great outdoors. Unable to plan trips to exotic destinations, we must seek out nearby points of interest. COVID has reinforced a profound spiritual lesson: joy in life is not achieved by chasing peak experiences but by cultivating the simple gifts of everyday life. This is where Sycamore Land Trust comes in. Sycamore makes available to all of us the ever-present blessings of nature.

Sycamore Land Trust's vision statement enumerates important reasons for protecting natural areas in southern Indiana: to maintain habitat for native plants and animals, to foster clean air and water, to sustain productive working lands, and to improve the quality of life for Hoosiers by means of a healthy environment. I would add one more: to establish natural sanctuaries, intact parcels of Creation for inspiration, enlightenment and renewal.

I love each of Sycamore's preserves for its unique features: the magnificent woods of the Canyon Forest Nature Preserve, the carpets of wildflowers at Porter West, and the rugged lakeshore at the end of the Amy Weingartner Branigin Peninsula Preserve. However, when I am looking to let go of stress, worry and anxiety, there is no better place than the Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill.

Dating back to the Middle Ages, the Christian monastic tradition designed special labyrinths for spiritual contemplation. The idea is that by following the labyrinth's circuitous pathway without regard to where it may lead, your mind is set free to focus on the here and now. Downey Hill's six-mile hiking loop, which doubles back on itself so many times that you feel like you're walking in circles, functions exactly like a labyrinth.

In discussions on environmental responsibility, many Jewish and Christian authorities cite Genesis 2:15: "The Lord God placed the human being in the Garden of Eden *to till it and to tend it*." This common translation suggests a tension between developing the

land *("to till")* versus safeguarding it for later use *("to tend")*. What many don't realize is that the original Hebrew can just as easily be translated: *"to serve it and preserve it*." In this reading, the dichotomy in our relationship to the land disappears, and we are left with an unambiguous Biblical ethic of land conservation. Humans are merely temporary residents on the Land, which ultimately belongs to God. (cf. Leviticus 25:23) As such, we are obligated to act as good stewards of our sacred trust.

To be sure, Sycamore Land Trust is a secular organization. However—know it or not—every time Sycamore protects one more acre, it is fulfilling a basic religious obligation! The word "sanctuary" comes from the Latin: "place of holiness." By definition, a sanctuary is set apart from the rest of civilization as a dwelling place for the Divine Presence. I am grateful to Sycamore for erecting dozens of sanctuaries throughout Southern Indiana.

Rabbi Brian Besser has served on Sycamore's Board of Directors since 2018. He is the religious leader of Congregation Beth Shalom, and Co-chair of the Bloomington Multifaith Alliance.

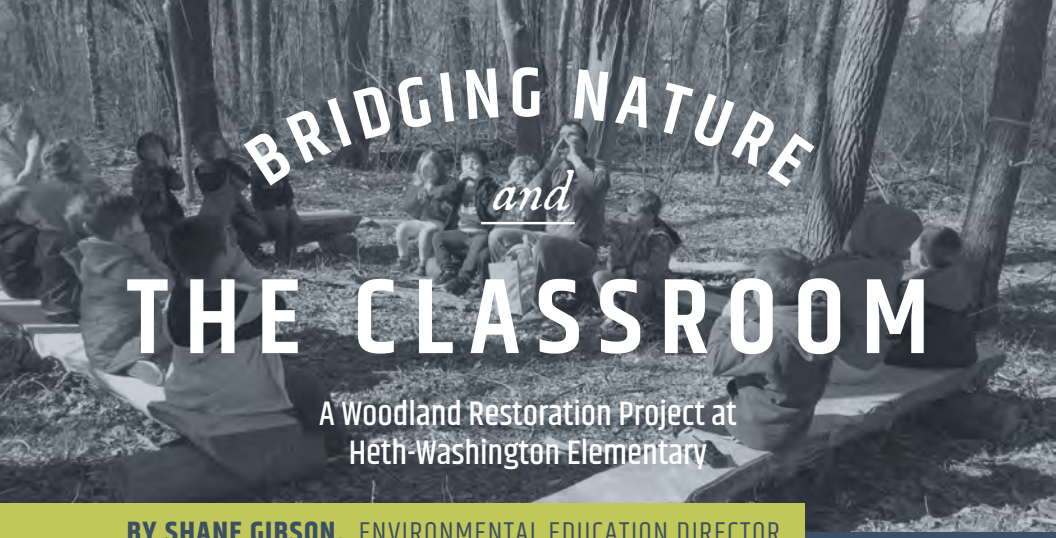
"I was absolutely blown away with how nice and well kept up this trail was! The boardwalk was so peaceful and made my whole morning better. I went to do some birdwatching and came out feeling completely rejuvenated and ready to tackle my tough day ahead. I think this speaks loudly to the beauty and healing of nature but ALSO to the incredible care and love that has been put into this trail. Thank you thank you thank you!!!! The work you do matters and is recognized!"

A varied thrush, a relative of the American robin and rare visitor to Indiana, snacks on poison ivy berries while stopping by our Eagle Slough Natural Area in Evansville. | Julia Farmer

Sycamore Sightings

Cedars Christian School students gather over a small blaze created with dryer lint and a magnesium fire starter during a wild edibles lesson led by Shane Gibson. | Heather Ummel

Vibrant foliage can be still seen along the forest floor during the colder months, like this rattlesnake plantain orchid spotted by Chris Fox during his annual preserve monitoring.



BRIDGING NATURE *and* THE CLASSROOM

A Woodland Restoration Project at Heth-Washington Elementary

BY SHANE GIBSON, ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR

"Don't go to the woods! There are snakes in there!"

These words were often uttered by teachers at Heth-Washington Elementary in Harrison County when I first met with Principal Nissa Ellett in 2017. The two acres of woods on the school ground had an impenetrable, uninviting edge — a tangled wall of multiflora rose, honeysuckle vine, goldenrod, and ragweed. It was a living and growing being that would "eat" basketballs and kickballs as they rolled off the playground. Mrs. Ellett and I had a vision to increase access to these woods, and new Principal Sue Lanham helped see the vision through.

With help from the Harrison County Community Foundation, Sycamore Land Trust entered into a partnership with Heth-Washington Elementary to bring nature-based programs to the school and create a master plan of projects intended to benefit students, teachers, and community members. The plan included goals for an exercise path, additional playground equipment, natural plantings, and restoring the woods to have trails, bridges, and interpretive signs. We narrowed our focus to the woodland restoration and creating an outdoor classroom, knowing the master plan would be there to guide further development when funds were available.

Eco Logic, a native plant restoration company, was hired to do forestry mowing along the woods' edge and

Shane Gibson leads an Environmental Education lesson for Heth-Washington preschoolers at the wood's outdoor classroom in 2018.

to cut the interior trails. Next, we hired Woodland Works to do several treatments of non-native, invasive plants. With the progress made from their efforts, we could finally enter the interior of the woods.

Lucas Coffman, a Heth-Washington parent and local business owner, donated ash tree stumps and split eastern red cedar for seating. Lucas's grandfather, father, and uncles originally developed the trails and other structures in these woods many years ago. Now, with his two children at the school, Lucas had a further personal connection to the woodland trails project.

With access to the woods now possible, preschool and sixth-grade students planted oaks and hickories to assist in the restoration. Upon resuming work a year later, we found that significant understory growth had occurred on the trail and around our seating areas. Another community partner, Eagle Scout Theodore Cooperwaite, worked with Principal Sue Lanham to organize the re-clearing. Theodore and crew had the area ready for Sycamore to begin building three bridges across the creek bed.

With Land Stewardship Manager Chris Fox's experience building the boardwalk at Beanblossom Bottoms, he supervised designing and building these bridges

The new outdoor class space at Heth-Washington brings students closer to nature and wildlife, like these Eastern screech owls spotted on the trail by Chris Fox and Shane Gibson last summer.

"[I] love all the fungi I see in Beanblossom Bottoms! Beautiful area! Thank you for maintaining the trails and providing a unique, natural area to enjoy."

using the same boardwalk material. Through the spring and summer of 2020, we worked on building the frames and placing the decking on the bridges. Parent and school neighbor David Bridgewater and his co-workers assisted in laying deck and back filling around the bridges. On a Saturday morning just before the first day of school, Harrison County high school students, along with myself and Heth-Washington parents, staff, and students, mulched and finished the trail.

Parent and volunteer David Bridgewater (right) and co-worker install bridge decking.

At Heth-Washington Elementary, students and teachers now have a viable option for outdoor learning. Where once a fortress of briars hid the wildlife, there is now an inviting trail system that has already provided sightings of eastern box turtles, three young screech owls, rabbits, animal tracks galore, cherry trees, spicebush, and hackberry trees. A space doesn't need to be vast to provide connections to nature. That space just needs to exist.

"Let's go to the woods! There are snakes in there!"

Special thanks to many partners and volunteers including the Harrison County Community Foundation, Principal Sue Lanham, former principal Nissa Ellett, parents David Bridgewater and Lucas Coffman, Theodore Copperwaite, and students and staff at Heth-Washington Elementary.

"I have been coming to Sycamore preserves since I was a young child, so thank you for providing such good access to nature."

PRESERVE ETHICS:

Practicing Stewardship Through Responsible Recreation

BY ROB MCCREA,
LAND PRESERVATION DIRECTOR

One day while working at the Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill, I noticed one of those ubiquitous plastic dog waste bags shoved under a log near the trailhead. While the person may have intended to carry out their pet's waste and simply forgot, it still resulted in an experience many of us have had in some form of another — a human-caused impact that affects the natural environment and another person's experience in it. Individually, these impacts may seem small, but their cumulative effect can harm the natural integrity we try to protect.

We can each do something about it. Practicing responsible recreation at nature preserves is all the more important when considering the increased visitation our preserves have experienced this past year. By acting responsibly, we can each become stewards of conservation and land protection.

Help Sycamore take care of its public nature preserves by following the preserve ethic guidelines above.

- **Walk your dog with a leash and pick up after your dog.**
  Be considerate of others and walk your dog on a leash. This will enhance the visitor experience for everyone and minimize impacts to wildlife.
- **Do not create or utilize side trails.**
  Unauthorized trails cause erosion and can harm the most sensitive areas at our nature preserves. Please resist the temptation to get closer to that special viewpoint and stay on the main trail. Avoid hiking when the trails are muddy.
- **Leave what you find.**
  Let the plants and rocks be so they can remain protected and be enjoyed by others.
- **Avoid overcrowding.**
  If the parking lot is full, that means the nature preserve has reached its carrying capacity of visitors. We want our visitors to be able to connect with nature, and too many people at the preserve at once leads to overcrowding. Park only in designated spaces and be respectful of our neighbors.

Part of Sycamore's mission is providing opportunities for people to get out and experience our public nature preserves. You can help us by following a preserve ethic each time you visit.

BY ANN CONNORS, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

MAJOR VISITOR ENHANCEMENTS

TO BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY PRESERVES

With the generous support from donors and volunteers, we are completing major trailhead and habitat restoration projects at Sycamore's Touch the Earth Natural Area and Tangeman Woods public nature preserves.

Touch the Earth Natural Area: This preserve, created in 1995 and now encompassing 98 acres, is one of the largest public natural areas in the county, welcoming thousands of visitors to its wooded forest, prairie flowers, and 1.9-mile nature trail.

Last fall, with a grant from Bartholomew REMC and Sycamore member donations, we expanded the parking area at Touch the Earth, putting in gravel and parking blocks and installing a split rail fence around the parking area. We also built a new educational kiosk to welcome visitors to the preserve. Thanks to a grant from the Cummins Corporation, we will be doing significant land stewardship work at Touch the Earth this year including removal of non-native, invasive species and habitat restoration.

Connie and Terry Marbach are long-time Sycamore supporters from Columbus. Terry served as a Sycamore board member and is a current member of our Advisory Board. Connie and Terry told us:

> We are happy to see that Sycamore is doing enhancements at Touch the Earth Natural Area and Tangeman Woods because they are having a dramatic increase in visitors due to COVID, and people are seeing that they are very nice places to rejuvenate.

Tangeman Woods: This 32-acre preserve is located less than a mile from Touch the Earth on the other side of State Road 46. The preserve was donated to Sycamore in 2007 by the Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Foundation, and it is named in memory of Clementine Tangeman, a co-founder of the foundation and past owner of the property.

The property consists of a beautiful mixed hardwood forest with intermittent creeks,

as well as a nature trail created in the 1970s by the Bartholomew County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Rick and Alice Johnson are long-time Sycamore supporters who live in Columbus, and Rick is a member of our Advisory Board. Rick and Alice gave us a $20K challenge grant to help make significant improvements to the Tangeman property and to encourage other donors to support the project. Rick told us:

> Alice and I have a deep appreciation for the natural world and have supported conservation through Sycamore Land Trust for many years. We are pleased to offer Sycamore a matching grant for its initiatives here in Bartholomew County to offer improved opportunities for residents to enjoy and learn about the wonders of nature that we so often take for granted.

The completed kiosk at Touch the Earth Natural Area, designed by Chris Fox and constructed by Sycamore staff and volunteers.

The enhancements at Tangeman Woods will include: creation of a larger parking area separate from the current fire station parking; installation of an educational kiosk and signage; doubling the trail to an over one-mile loop with the help of the Hoosier Hikers Council; and creating a one-acre native pollinator garden in an open area thanks to a grant from TC Energy.

Thank you so much to our financial supporters and volunteers for making these major projects possible. We look forward to seeing you at *your* Sycamore public nature preserves near Columbus.

"What a treasure! We're grateful for all the volunteers, staff, and donors who make it possible."

THE CANOPY *of* SYCAMORE'S WORK

On a glorious (albeit environmentally concerning) warm day in mid-November, my partner Sam and I embarked on a walk in our neighborhood, winding our way towards Lower Cascades Park. Basking in the glow of the sun, we commented on the warm breeze as it created a cacophony of rustling leaves. As we rounded a bend in the park, the sun illuminated the white, slender bark of several prominent trees.

If you know anything about trees, you probably read that sentence and thought, "well, that sounds an awful lot like a bunch of sycamores." Unfortunately, at the time, even after a year and a half as the O'Neill graduate fellow at Sycamore Land Trust, and even after learning about birds, about conservation easements, about the intricacies of trail maintenance, about bugs, about wildflowers, nonprofit management, grant writing, and staring at the Sycamore logo on a regular basis, I had still not learned my trees.

Staring up at those amazing trees, I was reminded of a plant identification app on my phone. I opened the app and took a picture of a leaf on the ground below the tree, which was identified as "American sycamore, *Platanus occidentalis.*" Sam and I looked up at each other and started laughing.

He probably will not let me forget that moment, and I certainly

BY EVA LAPP, COMMUNICATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT FELLOW

won't. Somehow it feels more fitting to have finally learned to identify a sycamore when experiencing the breath-taking beauty of these trees on my own terms. As Hank Huffman, one of Sycamore's founding members, described, old growth trees and hardwood forests are among some of the most awe-inspiring natural elements of south-central Indiana and "chief among these [trees], is the American sycamore . . . with their huge trunks and massive canopies." While tree identification is new for me, I now understand the powerful symbolism a sycamore tree holds for a southern Indiana land trust.

I am grateful for the many things I have learned in my brief time at Sycamore Land Trust. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Sycamore continues saving more land and building stronger relationships with our steadfast supporters, as well as new visitors and donors. Thank YOU for showing me the importance of our mission, and I look forward to joining you in supporting Sycamore's canopy of work.

Check out Sycamore's YouTube Channel to hear more from Hank and other founding members!

Eva has left a wonderful impact at Sycamore in her time here as our O'Neill graduate fellow. Thank you, Eva, for your hard work and sharing your birdfeeder sightings with us. We will miss you dearly, and best wishes for your future endeavors!

"I had a lovely visit…can't wait to visit more locations and learn more about the organization!"

BUSINESS AND FOUNDATION SUPPORTERS

DECEMBER 1, 2019 - NOVEMBER 30, 2020

$20,000 AND ABOVE

Cummins Foundation

Laura Hare Charitable Trust

$1,000 TO $19,999

Lorenz Family Charitable Trust

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Stars End Inc dba Tracks

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