



Ripples

A Publication for Members and Friends
Killbuck Watershed Land Trust

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It's a time to give thanks

Dear Friends,

The Killbuck Watershed Land Trust annual meeting at Bob and Karen Hunter's legacy tree farm in Holmes County was well attended and thoroughly enjoyed by young and old. At the right is Ethan Smith, 4, grandson of Denny Smith, our featured landowner in this issue. Ethan is sitting at the base of a 350-year-old red oak approximately 40 inches in diameter.

When I remember this day I give thanks for the beauty of the forest and the generosity of our hosts and their children. It happened to be a perfect summer afternoon, sunny with mild temperature which added to the energy and enjoyment of our 50 guests.

On the short agenda of the business meeting was election of officers, and I want to introduce you to our new roster. Linda Bush will continue as secretary, and Ron Holtman will remain our treasurer. Our new vice president is Robb Stutzman, an attorney with Logee, Hostetler, Stutzman and Lehman. Robb has expertise

working with landowners on a variety of issues including conservation easements. He is personable and enthusiastic and, while not new to the board, he is very willing to take on added responsibilities. He is our go-to person on working out the details of a conservation easement.

Randy Carmel was elected as board president. Before coming on board in 2014, Randy was instrumental in discovering and then enhancing the 113 acres owned by KWLT and known as the Brinkhaven Oak Barrens. He continues to manage this unique property as well as bring his energy and knowledge to address the many issues involved in the land

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Pipeline threatens protected farm

The last several months have seen KWLT activity including the landowner gathering and a change of officers (see above), as well as the NEXUS pipeline proposal and restoration work at Brinkhaven Barrens.

The NEXUS Gas transmission proposal for Wayne County could directly impact the Mellinger Farm easement that KWLT maintains with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (This farm was highlighted in the Winter 2016 issue of *Ripples*). In fact, the pipeline could bi-

sect farmland on the Mellinger Farm easement that is currently being used for crop diversity research. The extent of soil disturbance by pipeline development could make future soil research difficult, and next to impossible for current soil and crop research projects ongoing at this farm.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission was contacted with our concerns for this farm and we won't know the outcome for several months. I am hopeful that the line will follow the original

proposal to the north of Wayne County and the land easements we currently manage.

Progress is being made at the Brinkhaven Barrens property in Holmes County. This is the third year that KWLT has partnered with the Ohio Natural Areas and Preserves Association to help maintain the barrens. The last two years volunteers from ONAPA helped clear the south barrens of undesirable woody vegetation such as hawthorn, wild cherry and winged sumac, in

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Promoting, protecting and preserving our natural heritage

Thanks includes volunteers and property owners

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trust. Randy's many achievements as a teacher (he is now retired) were highlighted in the Fall 2011 issue of *Ripples*.

Thank you to our dedicated board.

We hold our quarterly board meetings at the Hotel Millersburg. Bill Richardson and his congenial staff are always welcoming and gracious in providing a room for our meeting. They also have worked with us to host annual events and fundraising festivities. We thank them for their great food and hospitality.

This newsletter would not be possible without the professionalism of our editor and former executive director, Melody Snure. She spends hours interviewing and taking pictures of every landowner featured in *Ripples*. She gathers articles for each issue and puts them in the format you see as the finished product. She keeps us on task to meet deadlines. She is simply wonderful and

has our profuse thanks.

The purpose of KWLTL is to be the vehicle for landowners to protect their properties through the tool of a conservation easement. This is a huge decision and involves a commitment from all family members so when a family approaches us to work with them to preserve their land forever from non-agricultural development, we are struck with admiration for their generosity to future generations of their community. Thank you to the landowners in partnership with KWLTL – 55 and counting!

This is the time of year when we traditionally ask for your financial help to keep us on track with our mission of preserving land. Please continue to do so. It is just one of the ways you can express your support for what we do.

We schedule events at landowner home sites as a way to showcase a unique protected property. Our board members

also visit, on an annual basis, each property under a conservation easement with KWLTL. I hope more of our supporters will consider joining us to volunteer on our monitoring visits. We travel through some of the most beautiful countryside of Ohio in the counties of Ashland, Holmes, Coshocton, Richland, Tuscarawas and Wayne.

I think you would love the experience of meeting landowners and seeing firsthand the property they cherish. We would love to have your company and give you thanks in advance. We are scheduling monitoring visits to begin the week after Thanksgiving. Please contact any of the board members listed in this issue for a date and time to come along.

Being part of the Killbuck Watershed Land Trust is one of the great pleasures of my life. Thank you, everyone.

Maryanna Biggio
KWLTL Trustee

KWLTL tackles pipeline objection, Barrens burn

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addition to a stand of non-native scotch pine. Brush and small trees were removed and a firebreak was renewed.

In early April 2016 a volunteer fire crew from ONAPA skillfully used a controlled burn to further the goal of clearing undesirable underbrush in the south barrens and in the brushy woods surrounding it – a great success as you can see from the photo below. Burning at the Brinkhaven Barrens is complex and difficult with the combination of rough terrain, with forest trees, brush and prairie grass as fuels, making this successful controlled burn all the more satisfying.

This autumn, ONAPA again put together a volunteer force and we began clearing the north barrens of undesirable woody vegetation that threatens to shade out the rare and unusual plant and animal diversity found there. This is the first effort in this north unit since its purchase. Much of the slope up from the



railroad grade was cut and treated as volunteers cut saplings, small trees, and brush with chain saws, hauled the material into the surrounding woods, and treated the cut stems to avoid resprouting. It was a great success. The north barrens will need additional cutting, and eventually a firebreak constructed so that it can be managed in much the same way as the south unit.

The cutting treatments and controlled burn in the south barrens will be followed up this autumn and early winter with a basal bark treatment on the persistent sprouting of winged sumac. Once this is under control, the prairie grasses and forbs can again thrive in a prairie-oak barrens environment.

This work would not be possible without the expertise and volunteer work force provided by ONAPA. We thank this organization for their diligent efforts to help maintain this unique habitat. ONAPA is a valuable organization, working annually at dozens of state preserves around Ohio, and worthy of membership. We are fortunate to have this partnership.

As incoming president of the board for KWLTL, I wish to continue the progress that has been made for more than 15 years by this organization. As we move forward and develop as a land conservancy, KWLTL will need to continue to partner with our members and volunteers, the community, and with other like-minded organizations to further our goals.

I am blessed that Maryanna Biggio will be providing assistance and direction as I learn the intricacies of leading a land trust. I want to thank her, on behalf of KWLTL, for all the hard work and guidance she has provided in her role as president of the board.

Randy Carmel, President
KWLTL Board of Trustees

Nurturing Gideon's orchard



The winter my dad died I pruned all the apple trees in our orchard to perfection. Every limb, every twig, every water sprout was trimmed just the way Dad would have done. For many years after he and Mom planted the small orchard in 1940, Dad nurtured the fruit trees with tender care. In March and early April before the farm fields were ready for plow and harrow, Dad would prune fruit trees. As the standard-sized trees reached maturity, they developed into a lovely umbrella shape just as Gideon Gerber had told Dad they would if trimmed properly.

For many autumns and winters we enjoyed the fruits of his labors. The cellar was always well stocked with applesauces from the two early Yellow Transparent trees and the McIntosh. Oven-warm pies and dumplings from the Northern Spy graced the tables of Thanksgiving and Christmas. Apple butter for toasted bread and to spice *panhaus*.

The Grimes Golden and Jonathan and Baldwin were stored for winter use in crates in the cool far end of the cellar. Next to the crates of apples was a barrel of cider, of which half we let turn into vinegar. For the finest flavor, the cider was pressed from as many varieties of apples as possible. Dried Jonathans provided schnitz for snacks and half-moon pies.

If the landscape of any farm is the owner's portrait of himself as Aldo Leopold suggests, our orchard was a fine picture of Dad. Maybe not pretty to the perfect-lawn folks, but to the wildlife community it was the epitome of health and beauty. The trimmings from the apple trees were left on a pile of brush that accumulated into a woody mountain after a few years. This was done for the benefit of the rabbits and mice and skunks and weasels for wintertime shelter. Ears of field corn were placed beneath the cover; thus the cottontails could eat without fear of the great horned owls.

The orchard was never mowed until at least the Fourth of July. By then most of the grassland birds had finished nesting and were flying in the hay fields. (A

patch of flowering dogbane, milkweeds, and yellow goatsbeard was left untouched for the butterflies.) Even when it was mowed with the hay mower, the tall grasses remained on the ground for mulch. That way the meadow voles had so much cover to live in and weed seeds to eat, the thought of eating the bark of apple trees never crossed their minds.

During the long winter evenings Dad would sit by the wood and coal stove and peel Baldwins (his favorite apple) for us children with his pocket knife; a knife that was also used to fix leather harness, cut twine, skin muskrats and carve our initials in the bark of beech trees. The multiple uses of the knife never bothered us. While we ate the tart and spicy sliced apples along with popcorn Mom had made, he told us stories of how the orchard came to be.

They bought the trees from Gideon Gerber, the successor of Johnny Appleseed in this part of the Midwest where descendents of the peculiar wanderer's trees still grow wild along fence rows. I eat their fruits, some bitter, some sweet, on chilly autumn days when I go wandering cross-country.

One tree in particular is special. It is growing at the edge of an exceptionally nice overgrown fence row. Its large yellow blemish-free apples hang late into the autumn, sometimes until Thanksgiving Day. Several times I have surprised deer beneath the tree waiting for those last apples to drop. The apples have a flavor unlike any other apple I have tasted. I can't describe their taste, just wildly different.

Like his mentor, Gideon Gerber was also a religious eccentric but instead of carrying the seeds and plants in a poke slung over his back and wearing a cooking pot for a hat, Gideon delivered his nursery stock in the trunk and back seat of a black car and always wore a black hat. St. Francis in a Chevy.

I remember Gideon best from the days my brother and I walked the mile and a half to and from the one-room country public school we attended. If Gideon, who was then already in his 70s, passed us, he would slam on the brakes and in a cloud of dust, slide to a stop. In his

broken, soft Swiss accent the plainly dressed little man asked whether we wanted a ride. Of course we did. We were always looking for adventure.

Since my brother was older he got in the front seat with Gideon, who for some reason never used the heater in the '55 Chevy, but covered his lap with a plaid buggy robe. While my brother covered himself with his share of the robe, I climbed in the back seat with the bundles of young fruit trees as goose bumps of anticipation danced up and down my spine.

Then we were off! Wheels spinning on the gravel, we went in a black streak down Big Hill, across the valley to roar across the loose planks on the bridge spanning Salt Creek, then up the hill to our farm. There again sliding to a dramatic stop accompanied by much dust. "Vell, here we are boys. It's good to see you both again. Have a nice day."

We replied in tandem, "Thank you so much Mr. Gerber. The ride was absolutely great!"

Since Dad and Gideon Gerber were both *landsmen* from the fertile farming valleys of Switzerland, Dad was always tolerant of Gideon's lead foot and would only chuckle when we told him that Gideon gave us a ride home from school. He knew how much we loved the thrilling ride. But then he added, since Gideon had so many people to see in this widespread farming community for their fruit tree and berry seedling needs, he had to hurry.

These were thoughts I pondered while I was pruning the apple trees in the spring following Dad's death. Every snip and shaping of the old trees brought healing and gratitude for the goodness of apples and the joys and pleasures Dad and Gideon Gerber gave to this community. Like their propagators, the old trees are dying, the Baldwin is gone, but now we are grafting cuttings on new root stock and the legacies of these two men live on in our small orchard.

David Kline, KWLTL Trustee

Ashland farmer sticks close to the land he loves

When Ashland County farmer Denny Smith admits that the last time he went on a vacation was in 1989, a visitor imagines, "That poor man. How many cows does he have to milk twice a day?" The answer is none.

Says Denny, "I'm dedicated to farming. I feel like I really can't be gone very long."

So he stays close to the more than 800 acres straddling Montgomery and Vermillion townships where he raises corn, soybeans, wheat and hay. His love for his farm is understandable. Eighty acres of the land has been in his family since 1837 when Christian Herschler, great-grandfather on his mother's side, purchased the tract after moving to Ashland County from the region of western Germany that became Alsace-Lorraine.

Though his father, Forest Smith, died in 2006 at age 102, Denny continues to call the original 80-acre tract "Dad's farm." It's where he and his siblings Ronald, John and Connie grew up. Today it's home to two dozen breeding ewes, some of which are descendants of the flock his grandfather tended more than a century ago. They graze in tender grass under an extensive stand of hardwoods.

Those hardwoods helped to solidify Denny's belief in the importance of conservation easements. Years ago, people would drive past the farm and admire the huge, straight trees along the frontage of Forest Smith's property. "There were always people coming around wanting to buy lots," Denny recalls. His father never had any intention of selling off the land but, Denny believes, "strung some people along for awhile just for recreation."

"Farms are being split up every day," Denny says, adding that the part of Ashland County where he has always lived is much different from what it used to be. Parceling off farmland is "not what I'm about," he says.

Far from it. Instead, he has gradually bought farmland in a two-mile-square section of his neighborhood and kept it in production. In 2005, Denny started the process of protecting his farm holdings from development. He sold conservation easements for the 80-acre farm where he lives and another 117 acres across the road to the Ohio Agricultural Easement



DENNY SMITH poses on his multi-generation Ashland County farm. Purchase Program. After his father's death, Denny donated that 80-acre easement to KWLTL and his brother John, who lives in Wyoming, donated the easement for a contiguous 86-acre property to KWLTL, which will monitor both properties forever.

In 2009, AEPP approved Denny for a conservation easement on a 113-acre farm where his grain bins are located, just down the road from the original family farm. In 2013, he had another 123 acres accepted into the AEPP program in which the state pays landowners the difference between the value of the property as farmland and as what its value would be if sold for development.

Currently pending is Smith's AEPP application for another 135 acres he owns, leaving less than 100 acres of his total farmland outside easement protection. Well, that's except for 250 acres of land nearby that he purchased at auction in September.

Not only does KWLTL monitor many conservation easements, it advocates for landowners when threats arise. Denny said he is grateful for the successful efforts of KWLTL and the Ohio Department of Agriculture to fend off a pipeline proposal that would have involved his farm.

For the season just ending, Denny harvested 360 acres of corn, more than 200 of soybeans, 200 of wheat and about 50 of hay. His son Steve, who earned a degree from The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute in Wooster, works full time at American Augers and helps Denny a couple of nights a week and weekends as needed. "Between the two of us, there's not much we need to hire done," Denny says.

Steve's son Logan has taken sheep to the Ashland County Fair the past three years. Logan's younger brother Ethan completes the sixth farm generation.

Denny is proud that both of his daughters also maintain connections to agriculture, with Shelli working for the Erie Watershed Soil and Water Conservation District and Lisa, a Shreve elementary teacher, married to Dustin Hendrix whose family owns Hendrix Grain Transport.

Melody L. Snure, Ripples Editor

Remember KWLTL in your year-end charitable gifts

Your membership in the Killbuck Watershed Land Trust helps to maintain the rural atmosphere that has made our area a desirable and unique place to live. We hope you will consider sharing your end-of-year philanthropy dollars with the land trust. We are a 501(c)3 organization and a donation to your local land trust is tax deductible. We thank you, so many of you, for your past support and hope you will continue to assist us financially as each year brings new challenges and great rewards.

To become a new member or to renew your membership for 2016, write a check payable to Killbuck Watershed Land Trust. Mail it to Killbuck Watershed Land Trust, 133 S. Market St., Wooster, OH 44691.

Killbuck Watershed Land Trust is a tax-exempt organization pursuant to Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Service Code. Donations are tax deductible.