



Ripples

A Publication for Members and Friends
Killbuck Watershed Land Trust

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Hassemans met challenges to satisfy conservation easement eligibility

Every landowner who decides to put property under a conservation easement must complete some paperwork. For Marilyn and Russell Haseman Jr. of Dalton, the paperwork included petitioning Wayne County to vacate a 126-year-old road on their property – a road that had never been constructed.

The Hassemans' 220-acre Marlu-Rusken Farm includes acreage that was platted in 1888 to include 21 lots for houses and an access road.

Then-owner Dr. Fenleon Pope may have hoped to capitalize on the Wheeling & Lake Erie Railroad line that ran just east of his newly purchased 40 acres north of Dalton. The east side of his acreage included a 1.456-acre easement for the railroad. Not only might housing sites have been attractive to railroad workers,

but a roundhouse and repair facility were said to be in the works.

The railroad chose Brewster for its roundhouse and repair site, and Pope's dream never materialized. In 1940 he sold the 40 acres to Jacob and Julia Haseman who already owned 120 acres just across Dalton Fox Lake Road. In 1953, the Hassemans' son Russell and his wife Hilda bought 60 additional acres, expanding the family farm to 220 acres on both sides of Rudy and Dalton Fox Lake Roads.

In 1980 Russell Haseman Jr. and his wife Marilyn bought the farm from his parents. In 2002 they purchased 5.7 acres along the east side of the farm from the railroad, which had ceased operations in Dalton in 1956.

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Proposed NEXUS re-route abandoned

Shortly after the last edition of Ripples was mailed out, the NEXUS Gas Transmission Pipeline re-route proposed to pass through Wayne County was abandoned.

This re-route would have impacted the Mellinger Farm, an easement held by Killbuck Watershed Land Trust and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. In written comments submitted by KWLTL to The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, it was noted that the NEXUS pipeline re-route would have a

negative impact on federally funded agriculture research by the Ohio State University, on farmland production, on the unnecessary longer re-routing and lateral gas lines that will be needed to reach the community of Green, the safety of locating three pipelines in close proximity (and crossing), and on our citizens' right to know and actively participate in decisions that impact our local resources and quality of life.

As a land conservation organization, KWLTL is committed to helping maintain a rural

landscape for the residents of this region. The high quality agricultural land and farming lifestyle is in need of protection both here and wherever poor choices in rural land development take place.

Through the development of relationships with landowners and residents, advocacy, and working towards intelligent land use planning and mitigation, KWLTL will continue to aid land conservation efforts in North Central Ohio.

The recent election illustrates
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Promoting, protecting and preserving our natural heritage

Advocacy: more important now than ever before

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the ever-changing political climate that affects all aspects of conservation. It will be important to let our voices be heard by our elected representatives, especially with new national policy initiatives being put in place by President Donald Trump and the majority of Congress that is now present in Washington.

Advocating for the Farm Bill, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and continuing the accomplishments of land conservation organizations nationwide is more important than ever with the changes of policy initiatives that come with a new federal administration.

Conservation lands and easements are under more and more pressure every day

in America. As population and development pressures increase, so does the value of conserved properties, making them vulnerable. Public entities, private individuals, foundations and the general public (through tax incentives) have invested billions of dollars to voluntarily conserve private lands in the U.S. At the same time, family farm incomes have dropped in recent years.

As an example in Wayne County, which leads the state in dairy production, there has been a 33 percent decline in milk prices in two years. This volatility in agricultural commodities makes farm production risky at times and creates financial hardships for farmers. This puts additional pressure on rural land as the

high cost of production and lower incomes generated oftentimes make the sale of prime farmland profitable as farmers struggle to make ends meet.

As a land trust, KWLTL will continue to advocate for conservation and the wise use of natural resources in our locality. The volunteers who work for this organization are giving of their time, and work to maintain and improve the quality of life for our citizens. We are committed to ensure that conservation easements are upheld and not violated, and see permanence to the conservation work of those who entrusted it to this organization.

**Randy Carmel, President
KWLTL Board of Trustees**

Emerald ash borer proves deadly

The emerald ash borer is a non-native insect that burrows into ash trees, eventually killing them within three to five years. The insect is spreading throughout Ohio, killing millions of trees within the state. Nothing has been able to stop the spread, and the outlook for ash trees in the eastern U.S. is bleak.

One out of every ten trees in our forests is ash, so the prospects are not good for the ecology of Ohio forests with this pest as well as several others attacking woodland trees (hemlock wooly adelgid, gypsy moth and Asian long horn beetle). In the KWLTL area, many property owners are finding infestations of ash borer in their woodlands and wondering how to respond.

We can take steps, using a professional arborist, to treat some trees around homes and commercial property, but this is an expensive and ongoing treatment. The more than half a dozen species of ash in Ohio are probably doomed as a component of our natural woodland environment. Property owners are urged to monitor the ash borer's movements and respond as necessary. There are no longer quarantine regulations for ash in Ohio as little can be done to stop the onslaught of the insect.

Dead and dying ash trees pose a threat to property owners and should be removed as soon as possible where they pose a hazard to homes, power lines and other structures. Dead snags can be

beneficial to wildlife left standing in woodlands where they pose no threat. Salvage logging can be attempted if it is profitable for commercial interests to remove enough timber trees profitably.

The decision to treat, remove or retain ash trees on private property belongs to the property owner. For further information, please contact the Ohio State University Cooperative Extension Program's EAB website at Fairfield.osu.edu or the Emerald Ash Borer Information Network at emeraldashborer.info.



Your KWLTL membership fosters land conservation

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. Your 2017 membership dues will be used for:

- Conservation education
- Public outreach
- Land acquisition and management
- Legal action to monitor and maintain conservation easements

Annual membership levels are:

- Friend, \$50
- Steward, \$100
- Conservator, \$250
- Protector, \$500

To become a new member or to renew your membership for 2017, 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.

Bur oak is tree of 'oak openings'

I like trees because they seem more designed to the way they have to live than other things do.

- Willa Cather

The only bur oak on our farm succumbed to an ice storm a couple of years ago. The oak was rooted on the west bank of the little creek that has its origins at Al's spring-fed stock trough a mile up the hollow. Floodwaters over the years had undermined its roots until it leaned out across the stream into the pasture field. After every hard rain it leaned a bit more. The tons of ice that accumulated on the branches of the oak's large crown during the storm were too much and it crashed to the ground.

In this part of Ohio, where the eastern woodlands give way to the grasslands of the Midwest, the bur oak is usually a loner growing in moist, well-drained floodplains. Many timber cutters call them "swamp oaks" and are unaware that they are cutting down a bur oak. It is one of the minor oak species, along with the shingle, scarlet, and swamp white oaks, in our woodlots of predominantly white and red oaks.

What makes the bur oak interesting to me is its unique acorn. The largest of all acorns, it can measure up to two inches across and is almost enclosed by its fringed cup, giving the appearance of a human face encircled with a tightly-drawn fur-trimmed parka. Because of its fringed acorn, it is sometimes called mossycup oak. Our children called them the "hippie acorns" because of that mop-top.

While the bur oak is uncommon in the East, it is the tree of the "oak openings" and the oak that colonized the prairies. The eastern woodlands had difficulty invading the thick grasslands of the prairies, although in the continuing cycles of droughts and wet years, most of the prairies of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan were overcome with forestlands before the arrival of the European settlers.

In "Where the Sky Began," John



Madson writes on the westward march of the eastern hardwoods: "But the grasslands had a powerful ally – a ravaging force against which most trees could not hold their prairie gains. Some of the plains Indians called it 'Red Buffalo.' The white man called it many things. It was wildfire."

Wildfires, usually started by lightning in the sun-parched tall grasses, raged across the prairies with walls of flame 40 feet high and traveled at the speed of the wind. Driven by the prevailing westerly winds, the fires flew into the face of the advancing hardwoods. The woody plants could not withstand the 400-degrees-Fahrenheit, wind-driven heat and died, allowing the prairie's

fire-tolerant grasses to regain lost ground.

Before the bur oaks could gain a toe-hold on the prairie, the way was opened by the sumac, wild plums, and other shrubs. The edge of this shrub zone may have advanced only ten feet before being driven back by fire. In the weakened area of burned brush, the bur oak set down its roots. The tough oak seedling sent down its ten-inch taproot before any leaves appeared. By its third

summer, the bur oak was still a three-foot sapling, but its roots had colonized an area four feet wide and six feet down.

If the bur oak is fortunate enough to escape a wildfire for a decade it will thrive, because by then it will have grown a thick crust of corky bark and practically becomes fireproof. It is the only tree that can survive a prairie fire. With its burly resistance to fire, the bur oak slowly moved westward.

But what really set the stage for westward migration of the bur oaks was the arrival of European settlers. As soon as enough of the grasslands were plowed to stop the wildfires, bur oaks – and other hardwoods, for that matter – traveled west with settlement. Aldo Leopold writes in "A Sand County Almanac" that all the bur oaks in which he counted the growth rings, except a few old veterans, dated to the 1850s and 1860s, the time that prairie wildfires ended in Wisconsin.

When I cut the oak for firewood I counted close to a hundred growth rings. The heat from its wood was a long time in coming and we savored and cherished every minute of it.

David Kline, KWLTL Trustee

Farm is currently operated under lease agreement

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As the Dalton dairy farmers were buying the vacated railroad land, the youngest of their three children (Stacey, Jeremy and Andy) was soon to graduate from college. And while it is often a parent's dream that a child will return to continue farm ownership, that wasn't in the cards for the Hassemans.

So what was to become of the productive Holstein dairy operation? It became obvious to the Hassemans that the farmland needed to be preserved. "I've seen so much farmland taken over the years," said Marilyn. "And when it's gone, it's gone forever."

With a mile of frontage and within sight of the village, their land could have been a gold mine for development. And that's not including the 21 housing sites accessed by the 50-foot-wide dedicated road approved in 1888 but never developed.

In 2014 the Hassemans petitioned the Wayne County commissioners to vacate the dedicated road, a condition for making the land eligible to come under a conservation easement. The commissioners came to the farm to inspect the land, which then-commissioner Jim Carmichael described as "a road you can't drive over."

At a public hearing in Wooster a week later, with nobody voicing any objection, the officials voted to vacate the road, opening the door for the easement to be finalized.

In 2015, in an arrangement included in



THE MAIN BARN on the Hasseman farm was home to scores of Holsteins over the years, usually 80 to 90 animals at a time. A back barn continues to house dairy heifers and some beef cattle tended by a neighbor who leases the farm today.

the conservation easement with KWLTL, the Village of Dalton purchased from the Hassemans 2.051 acres of cropland contiguous to the sewage treatment plant to allow for future expansion. Separately, the Hassemans granted the village an easement across their land to extend a sewer line north and west to serve village residents along North Church Street.

KWLTL Vice President Robb Stutzman, who is a Wooster attorney, and then-KWLTL President Maryanna Biggio worked with the Hassemans to navigate the multi-step easement process. Stutzman said the Hassemans' easement is ideal because the protected land abuts the village. Residents will be able to enjoy the vista of undeveloped cropland while future owners can go about the business of farming undisturbed.

As for future owners, older son Jeremy has no aspirations to farm, but would love to live on the Hasseman homestead someday with his wife and four children. The 198-acre conservation easement does not include the 14-acre core of the farm with its house (photo at left), main barn and more than a dozen other farm buildings.

A biology researcher, Jeremy Hasseman could live there the way his parents have for the past four years since they sold the dairy herd and related

equipment. Marilyn had cared for the herd until knee replacement surgery sidelined her and brought the dairy dispersal idea to mind.

She admits that while she had dreaded going to the auction to see "her girls" sold, it turned out to be a lighthearted event with friends from the farm community. Active in her Orrville church, she had named some of the dairy cattle for ladies of the congregation. Several of the ladies came to the sale to see "their" cows get new homes.

These days the Hassemans' 160 tillable acres, 30 acres of pasture and back barn are leased by a young neighbor. He comes twice a day to tend to the heifers and beef cattle he raises there for other area farmers, and also crops the land.

It's a wonderful arrangement all around, Marilyn says, enabling them to retire on their own property. Her tradition is to plant a tree to celebrate the birth of each grandchild. In various stages of growth the homestead trees include a hickory, an oak, a maple, a red maple, a tulip poplar and a ginkgo for Stacey's two children (in a Boston suburb) and Jeremy's four (in Leesburg, Va.). Son Andy, who is single, lives in Chicago.

Last year Marilyn crossed an item off her bucket list. She paid to have the barn, which had been yellow for years, painted red. "I've always wanted a red barn," Marilyn grinned.

Melody L. Snure, Ripples Editor