



Ripples

A Publication for Members and Friends
Killbuck Watershed Land Trust

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Students present business plan for KWLT

Dear Friends,

This winter we had the pleasure and privilege of working with three College of Wooster students who were taking an independent study course under the direction of Matt Mariola. Matt is associate professor of environmental science and a board member of Killbuck Watershed Land Trust.

Erin Andrews-Sharer (senior Spanish major), Ruben Aguero (sophomore economics major) and Annette Hilton (sophomore geology major) chose through this elective class to study the history and management of KWLT and then to create a business plan

which, when adopted, will make our organization much more effective and viable in the area of non-profit conservation groups.

We are impressed with the time the students spent comparing KWLT with six other Ohio land trusts of similar size and scope of operations, and grateful to Owl Creek Conservancy, Appalachian Ohio Alliance, Licking Land Trust, Land Conservancy of Hamilton County, West Creek Conservancy, and Hillside Trust for sharing information.

We are surprised, and in many instances humbled, by the data the students collected. For instance, KWLT

holds more conservation easements and protects more acres than the other land trusts in the study, yet we spend fewer hours per week with our easements than any of the others.

Four of the land trusts are fortunate to have at least one paid employee whose job description includes office management, public outreach, fundraising, increasing membership and event planning. KWLT is entirely a volunteer-based, 12-member board of directors. Each has diverse professional skills and/or a desire to enhance their community.

We also have an office in a
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Easement protects Alkire-English property

Putting their scenic 50-acre property under a conservation easement wasn't a quick decision for Bill Alkire and Susan English who live northwest of Wooster. "We would run into Maryanna (Biggio) at Buehler's and the discussion would resume," remembers Susan.

Unlike many easements held by KWLT, the couple's homestead isn't a working farm, nor does it have acres of land ripe for development. Much of the property is cov-



ered by trees, including the 2,000 hardwoods Bill and his family planted after moving there in 1969. It was talk about a neighbor's possible land sale that moved them to protect their land.

"We certainly didn't want to see development," says Susan. "We thought we would set the example for our neighbors and do our part."

As the years pass, their commitment to the land becomes more challenging. Bill, who will celebrate his 88th birthday in July, can no longer tackle the physical work he thrived on after his Wooster day job as a mental health professional.

Good fortune smiled on the
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Promoting, protecting and preserving our natural heritage

Plan includes online database, funding, administrator

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wonderful setting and centrally located within the county areas we serve.

At this time, the office is more or less a storage area for the bundles and boxes of paper documents that accumulate with conservation easements. Our “membership” is loosely defined as many of you who have supported us financially or simply expressed appreciation for what we do.

It now behooves us as a land trust with great responsibility to begin to implement this well-considered and candid assessment of our organization. We feel a good starting point would be to convert our paper-based system to an online database. This could and should be done within the next three to six months. Next comes a full-fledged fundraising campaign and for that we rely on a commitment from our board of trustees and citizens of the communities where we are an important, in many cases unrecognized, presence. And next comes the exciting possibility of a salaried part-time administrator. As with so many good things, it does take money.

Early on in our sessions with Annette, Erin and Ruben we were asked to define KWLTL, but what we thought we heard was the word “quilt.” Puzzled, we began to explain that a quilt is made with love, usually patched with beautiful fabrics and patterns, and provides warmth, comfort and beauty. We have made quite a few quilts and have more in the planning stages.

Then it dawned on us, after all these years. Say it out loud: KWLTL is “quilt.” We feel like we have a new theme song. Some quilts are a family heirloom and last forever – just like a conservation easement. KWLTL is now an acronym, and like so many others, hidden and yet obvious. It took the young and brilliant minds of Annette and Erin



COLLEGE OF WOOSTER students (from left) Ruben Agüero, Annette Hilton and Erin Andrews-Sharer pose with instructor Matt Mariola and KWLTL President Maryanna Biggio after their presentation on a proposed business plan for KWLTL. Mariola is a member of the KWLTL Board of Trustees.

and Ruben, along with Matt Mariola, to bring it to our attention. Thank you!

* * * * *

Look for farmers’ markets opening soon near you. It’s delicious to support our neighbors and their products.

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Please comment on any articles you see in Ripples. Send us your thoughts and ideas for future stories of interest to our readers. You can reach us, particularly editor Melody Snure, by using our contact information on the left side of Page 1.

Maryanna Biggio, KWLTL Board President

All officers re-elected during annual meeting

All five KWLTL officers were re-elected during the annual meeting held March 21 at the Sonnenberg Village restoration project near Kidron. With President Maryanna Biggio and co-secretary David Wilkin (right) are Kidron Community Historical Society President Wayne Liechty (left) and project manager Ray Leisy, who explained the effort to recreate the Mennonite-Swiss village on a five-acre campus. Also re-elected were Neal Caldwell, vice president; Ron Holtman, treasurer; and Linda Bush, co-secretary.



Young owls thrive in borrowed home

This year the great horned owls left their decades-old nest and moved across the road to a smaller, and less desirable, old crow's nest. The crow's nest will suffice for one brood while their old home is being renovated.

I made the discovery of the owls' move while I was cutting firewood late last winter. Having shut off the noisy saw, I was getting ready to load the wood when I heard the crows screaming bloody murder – another skirmish in the endless owl/crow war – and they were headed my way.

I sat motionless and watched the chase. The owl, instead of taking off low through the woods, went straight for the crow's nest, landed on it, and settled down on what I presumed to be eggs. Then it saw me. Those wild yellow eyes that had stared with unrestrained hatred at the crows, with like passion, glared at me. The crows, too, saw me and skulked off like black ghosts a short distance to await the owl's next move. Finally, ever so slightly, I moved and the owl became unglued and left with the crows in merry pursuit.

I kept checking the nest every week or so but never saw much activity. I did notice that the quality of the small nest, small for great horned owls that is, was deteriorating. It finally got so bad that the young owls, already nearly the size of their parents, left it and are now half-flying around the woods. Sometimes they are on the ground and sometimes in trees – usually in leaning trees where they can flap and claw their way to the top.

From their lofty perches, the young then beg for food. And what a variety

of fare they are getting. Our woods and bottom pasture field are like an owl supermarket. One evening we walked down to the woods to look for mushrooms, when we surprised the owlets. Both flew but gradually lost altitude, like Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose, and ended up on the ground.



It was obvious what was on the menu for supper – the evening air was rank with the pungent smell of skunk. The young owls, while almost full-winged and having the facial pattern of the adults, were still “hornless” and covered with down. Their talons were razor-sharp, ready to grip and slice through hide – or hand, if offered.

Great horned owls will kill and eat just about anything, especially with two rapidly growing and endlessly hungry young. I have found, besides the skunk, the remains of partially-eaten rats, cottontail rabbits and muskrats, and the feathers of robins, mourning doves, mallard hens and, of course, crows.

At night, incubating crows must present an almost irresistible

temptation to hunting owls. So open and so vulnerable. And if owls have any memory, such a grand opportunity to get back at the crows for their pestering habits during the daytime.

According to the number of black feathers I find, the owls have more than evened the score. I'm surprised any crows survive the nesting season in the neighborhood of an owl family. Crows have a legitimate reason to hate owls and the war goes on.

Likewise with mallard hens on their nests. One had a clutch of ten eggs on some old hay bales we are saving for garden mulch. One night last week she disappeared. The ratio of mallard hens to drakes is already around one to four and it doesn't look too promising to improve this spring as the owls go about their nightly duck hunts.

It may seem that the great horned owl is merciless to small creatures that inhabit our farm. But a duck or crow or cottontail is to an owl what a mosquito is to a swallow or a cabbage looper to a chipping sparrow or a fish to a heron: food.

Back to the owls' renovation of their old home: a pair of red-tailed hawks did the work. The hawks enlarged and improved it by adding a six-inch-high layer of sticks to the nest. For payment, the hawks get to use it for a season.

Last week the female redtail was incubating eggs. But if I were a betting man, I'd dare to wager the farm that by next February the ears of a great horned owl will be protruding above the remodeled nest.

David Kline, KWLTL trustee

The most satisfying words we hear as a land trust are when landowners state they feel so comforted knowing the land they love will be forever protected. There is much work and decision-making that goes into crafting a conservation easement – many layers of wordage to get it just right with not just the present but thinking ahead to the far distant

future. Every stitch must be made with care to ensure a perfect finished product. Our board members in the legal profession are the experts in working with the landowner to get the design in place. You might say, “We've got you covered!”

Maryanna Biggio, KWLTL Board President

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pair 15 years ago when fate joined Susan, a city girl who had always dreamed of being an outdoor person, with Bill, a widower eager to share his life and love of the land.

“This is the most exotic place I’ve ever lived,” says Susan, a world traveler who met Bill years before when he and his late wife headlined a dance camp in Michigan. A singer and dancer since his teen years in Delaware County, Bill taught dance for 70 years.

He invited Susan to visit his home on the way back from a dance school in Berea, Kentucky. He recalls with a smile, “I drove her in on a back road and she exclaimed, “How could anybody live in such a remote place!”

The place quickly grew on her. She tends the 60x90 no-till garden mulched with grass clippings and leaves and watered from a rain barrel collection system. Customers of Local Roots know her as the rhubarb lady, keeping the store stocked with the progeny of a plant from the garden her mother tended in the 1950s (see photo inset on Page 1).

A forester confirmed to Bill and Susan that their field which had been “going back to nature” would be ideal for a new hardwood stand. Susan is planting 60 to 80 new hardwoods annually, working with a forest plan.



BILL ALKIRE AND SUSAN ENGLISH show off the diverse garden at their home on Clear Creek Valley Road west of Wooster. Bill has had to shift the garden’s location several times over the past 46 years as a row of Norway Pines he planted continues to reach upward and shade the eclectic plot.

“In our world, it’s a way I can do some good,” she says of the new trees, which have a 50 percent survival rate.

Alkire has two children who lived on the land as children. Zeke teaches science at an Akron school while Chris and her husband Brian Smedley, who have two daughters, live near Fredericksburg. Though neither has expressed interest in living on the land, the con-

servation easement allows for a pair of two-acre plots where homes could be built. Susan has a life estate and, if Bill should precede her in death, would have an equal vote with Zeke and Chris on any sale of the land, with all three needing to agree for any action to take place under the trust rules.

That arrangement doesn’t solve the current concern they and many other older couples face about how to keep on top of a high-maintenance piece of property. The two-story home Bill designed is decorated with baskets and brooms he crafted over the years while pursuing an active schedule of dance instruction. He is well known as founder and long-time director of Cedar Valley Cloggers.

Susan, too, keeps busy with dance. Last year she founded a group of madrigal dancers who perform to music from the 1600s through 1800s. They debuted last fall at the Sonnenberg Village Beet Festival where the 18 participants of all ages donned period costume to entertain an appreciative audience.

Melody L. Snure, Ripples editor

Your KWLT membership helps to conserve area lands

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 2015 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 2015, 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.