

# Nature News

Quarterly Newsletter of the Cadillac Area Land Conservancy



Spring 2021

## A Job Well Done

Fred Sprague retired from the CALC board after more than 18 years of volunteer work. Fred has been instrumental in procuring easements and worked closely with Deborah Kohn to secure her sizeable estate and establish the Kohn preserve River. Fred helped at events like the Harrietta Blueberry Festival and arranged for Fred Vandyke to come talk about a Christian's special responsibility to take care of the earth. For many years Fred was CALC's treasurer and perhaps his greatest contributions were writing our investment policy, setting up a new endowment fund in the Cadillac Area Community Foundation and encouraging donations.



## Tom Rensberry shares his recollections of Fred

*What comes to mind when I think of Fred Sprague is dedication, consistency, loyalty and great management skills and comprehension of difficult ideas. Quite frankly, I can't give Fred enough accolades.*

*As one of the first CALC board members, he immediately comprehended what a conservation easement was and how it practically worked. Right from the start Fred took on, with urgency, all assignments and did not hesitate to volunteer for anything CALC needed. Fred stayed the course while others have come and gone. It did not matter whether CALC was struggling or doing well, Fred was there.*

*I know Fred personally and greatly respect him. One story I can share defines his true character. Some time ago Fred made a trip to New Mexico to hunt elk with a bow. He self-guided into the wilderness. He located, called in and shot a nice bull elk. Now he had to get it out, using his skills as a packer and butcher, he used a horse to get it back for transportation to Michigan. He was not a young man at this time. That pretty much says it all.*

## Waldeck Island Birding

The March issue of *Traverse, Northern Michigan's Magazine* listed natural areas and preserves that offer some of the best birding in the state. The first on the list was our own Waldeck Island Nature Preserve! Located on Stone Ledge Lake, it is one of the most productive birding locales in the Cadillac area. There's a trail system, a land bridge to the island and a viewing platform. A wide range of birds can be observed, particularly during spring migration. Grab your binoculars and get directions to the preserve on our website - <https://calc-landtrust.org>



Photo by JHiggins

## "Muddy Day? Please don't play."

That's the catchy slogan used by the Michigan DNR to remind us how to protect our trails this spring. Riding a bike or walking on a muddy trail destroys the surface, leaving ruts, deep holes, tire or footprints and leads to erosion. Spring is an especially sensitive time because frost layers often linger below the trail surface and spring rains have trouble permeating the soil and draining away. If you encounter a muddy section of a trail, wheel your bike or hike through the center of the trail, not to the sides since that will widen the trail.





## Director's Corner - Chris Gentry

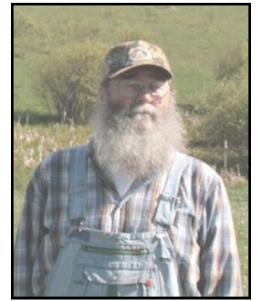
It's an exciting time to be involved in conservation work locally, statewide, and nationally. With the passage last fall of the federal **Great American Outdoors Act**, the National Land and Conservation Fund is now fully funded. A few months later Michigan voters approved state **Proposal 1** which updated and expanded the **Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund**. These actions have the potential to enable new land conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities.

In January the President signed the 30x30 Executive order, a call to action that puts America on the path of protecting 30% of its land and 30% of its oceans by 2030. It's been encouraging to note that these efforts have strong bi-partisan citizen and political support. Land Conservancies will be important partners in achieving this goal.

Locally, we are working with a number of folks to help steward special places in their lives. Places that are not only important to them but to all of us.

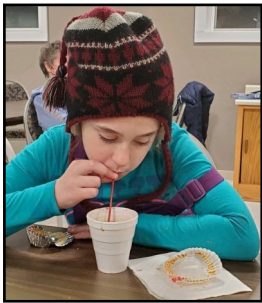
## Remembering Floyd

Floyd Justus, an ardent CALC supporter, died in February. He and his wife Denise put an easement on their 68 acre dream farm in Tustin and were usually seen at CALC events. Floyd loved spending time working the farm and took pride in restoring and improving it.



Fred Sprague says that Floyd could have become wealthy by selling his land, across the road from a golf course, for condos, but put an easement on it instead. He often delayed grain harvests to allow fledgling birds to leave their nests. He worked with conservation agencies to improve his land and always kept his commitments to the letter.

Fred adds that although he was retired military, Floyd kept a yard sign saying "War Is Not the Answer." A good man who will be missed!



## A Snowshoe Hike (and a conservancy convert)

More than 30 hardy folks showed up for the Harrietta Candlelight Snowshoe Hike on a cold night in January. Headed by Patti Dunning, the family-friendly event even attracted a couple visiting from Chicago.

A friend's 10 year-old granddaughter, Mariska reported: "There were candles in little paper bags that let out only a certain amount of light, but it felt natural. There was some moonlight guiding you as well. It was very beautiful and adventurous. I'm sure it was pretty cold at 10° or something, but we were wearing coats. As long as you have

the proper wear, it was not that bad. (Smart kid!) There were a lot of people from babies to old people - some of them even pulled their kids in sleds. I hope everyone knows there was a lot of work put into this."

Mariska also thought it might have taken a lot of work to put out all those candles and light them, but, she said, "In the end, it's much more than worth it!" Mariska also appreciated the work that went into "hot cocoa and nice yummy treats" at the village hall after the hike.

We've gained a supporter in young Mariska who, thanks to her grandma, now knows what a land conservancy does. "They take a piece of land that was all natural and then, instead of making it into their own business, they make it so everybody can enjoy it, but it cannot be built on, so there is still some land left for future generations. Since many precious animals' habitats are getting knocked down by people, land conservancy means that animals and their habitats will be conserved. Trees provide oxygen, so people who are greedy don't realize it, but it is actually saving their lives by keeping some trees up." Mission accomplished, Patti!



## We're Welcoming Two New CALC Board Members

### Shari Spoelman

Shari grew up on the west side of the state and took her early steps on the dunes of Lake Michigan. This area continues to be an important location for her and helps define who she is and what she loves. Shari enjoys traveling and has visited many lovely parts of the world. Being a part of the natural world and having out-door experiences are two of Shari's passions. She is grateful to be physically fit to be able to hike and enjoy outdoor adventures.



Shari has lived in Cadillac since 1978 and enjoys the rich natural resources of the Cadillac area. She is looking forward to her new opportunity to serve on the Cadillac Area Land Conservancy board, and commented, "I have an interest in protecting large, interesting, and/or diverse land from development and to make it available for others to enjoy. I am also interested in serving to honor a commitment I gave to Larry Copley that some day I would do more to help the Conservancy. I appreciate all he and Margo did for CALC over the years and I hope I can give back just a small portion of what they and so many other longtime volunteers have given over the years to make the Conservancy what it is today.

Shari has two adult children and has been married to Gary VanHouten for over 25 years. She is the District Director for Michigan State University Extension and recently completed 12 years as an elected official on the City Council for Cadillac.

Her hobbies are skiing - all kinds, hiking and backpacking, snow-shoeing, sewing (she makes upcycled clothes), soap making, cooking and canning, puzzling, playing the ukulele and pickleball.

### Susan Conradson



I grew up in Traverse City and went to college at Lake Superior State University and Michigan Technological University where I got degrees in Environmental Science (BS) and Environmental Engineering (MS). After a brief stint of working at an environmental consulting firm in Minneapolis, I ended up working for the State of Michigan in Lansing and eventually ended up at the DEQ (now EGLE) working in the Cadillac District office.

I work in permitting, issuing permits for doing work in wetlands, lakes, streams, dunes and floodplain areas. That is what pays for the fun!

For fun I like to downhill and cross-country ski in the winter and you will find me at Caberfae most weekends. I also make an attempt at playing hockey, although I am not good. In the summer I like to kayak, boat (we have a pontoon) and go hiking. I have recently discovered the North Country Trail and did a lot of hiking on those trails this past summer/fall.

I am married to Scott (16 years now) and have one daughter, Erica, who is in 7th grade. We adopted a puppy last year, so we have an additional Australian Shephard child named Skittles.

I am looking forward to the world opening back up again so we can do some travelling and camping in my new teardrop trailer.

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### DNR Turns 100!

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on March 30, 2021.







## Finding Sandhill Cranes by Dave Foley

As I paddle my solo canoe into the cove, the rising sun sends slivers of yellow-tinged light across the water painting the lake surface a silky black and orange. A layer of gray mist retreats to the north, sliding off the water over the marshy shore. Reaching for my fishing rod, I impale a tiny grub on a miniature red feathered fly trailing beneath a bobber. I lob a gentle cast toward a clutch of lily pads.

A flurry of activity and a raucous squawking catches my attention. I stare at two birds. "Impossible," I think, "they're as big as ostriches!" One rears up, spreads its wings, does a small hop and makes a flapping motion at a diminutive black bird darting toward it. I try to catch the details, but the birds are back-lit by the sun and I see only silhouettes. The small feathered one dives again at the two giant avian creatures, then flies away. The pair of birds, which by now I realize must be sandhill cranes, continue to graze on the shoreline. In the brightening morning light, the birds appear to be buff-brown in color with dark markings on their heads.

Then I hear honks down the lake as a Canada goose takes to the air, honking with each wing beat as it approaches, skimming across the water surface as it lands. The goose glides toward the cranes who now are standing on a grassy patch of lawn. Another goose appears from behind a clutch of cattails and extends its neck, tucks its head low as it begins to move toward the bigger birds. The geese are obviously protecting a quartet of newly hatched goslings that I see at the edge of the lawn. Not appearing to be flustered, the cranes nonetheless move away a few yards and continue to feed. The geese stand their ground eying the cranes. Then the black birds reappear, red patches on their wings now make their identity certain. Perched on brown cattails, a pair of these red-winged blackbirds keep an eye on the cranes. They're agitated. Their shrill ratchet call is obviously intended as a warning to the interlopers. I'm certain they have nests nearby. Occasionally one of the blackbirds launches an aerial attack – diving at the crane's head, pulling back just before making contact.

I pull my camera from under the canoe seat and begin taking pictures. My canoe drifts toward shore. I'm less than thirty feet away but am ignored. The feathered contingent of geese and red-winged blackbirds are too intent on repelling the invading cranes to give me notice.

With the sunlight now full on the birds, I can see the scarlet patch near the bill that is characteristic of sandhill cranes. Although we have resident blue herons during the open water season, this is only the second time that I have seen sandhill cranes on Lake Mitchell. I must confess that it wasn't until the last few years that I actually started paying close attention to the avian populations in the area. But I do think I would have noticed if birds as large as sandhill cranes were around. It's hard to miss a bird with a wingspan of six to seven feet. In flight, blue herons, which are smaller, pull their necks back into an "S" shape while cranes extend their necks straight out.

Eventually some sort of truce was reached. The Canada geese returned to their goslings and the red-winged blackbirds continued emitting intermittent grating screeches, but quit the dive bombing. The cranes stood their ground, went back to pecking at the grasses and I returned to my fishing.



### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Chris Gentry

### OFFICE MANAGER

Norma Roelfsema

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Marco Menezes, *Vice-chair*  
Tom Anderson, *Secretary*  
Marty Williams, *Treasurer*  
Sue Conradson  
Cyndy Foley  
Dave Foley  
Sam Hogg  
Shari Spoelman

### VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

Sandy, *bookkeeping*  
Pete Eliot, *investment*  
Richard Harvey, *monitoring*  
Marty Williams, *social media*  
Pat Paveglio, *newsletter*  
Eric Zeitz, *website designer*

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Visit our webpage at [www.calc-landtrust.org](http://www.calc-landtrust.org)

### *Mission Statement*

*The Cadillac Area Land Conservancy protects ecologically significant, scenic, and farm lands for current and future generations and fosters an appreciation of the natural environment in Missaukee, Osceola, Wexford and northern Lake and Mason Counties.*