

# New and Noteworthy Developments

*By Susan Sprigg, Director of Operations*

We continue to evolve our internal structure within Cardinal to allow us to execute outstanding delivery of our conservation mission. Our organization has grown rapidly in recent years, and we now stand at a total of 18 employees, sitting in 3 office locations: Loveland, Bahr Farm, and our Clifton office. As our geography has grown, we've designed new processes to facilitate effective coordination, including an internal newsletter, regular staff meetings, and shared communication platforms.

We continue to maintain our facilities at each site, and are working toward a strategic plan for renovation and use of each of the buildings. Big news at the Loveland facilities has been the nearly-completed new roofs on two buildings - our current office building, and the "House of Joy" Victorian - to maintain the integrity of these historic spaces. We're excited to expand community use of this space in coming years.

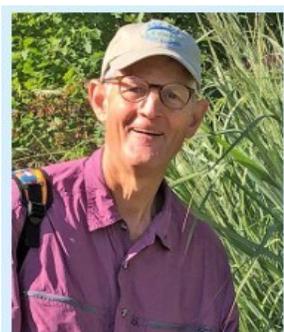
Our stewardship team has been very active on the Nature Preserve at Loveland as well. In recent weeks they have focused on clearing invasive wintercreeper and



**The Victorian house roof replacement is the first of many renovations for this incredible building.**

bittersweet from the forest, and soon will begin treating invasive pear trees. The team was excited to come across a mink burrow as they worked! We've also installed our state-of-the-art Bat Condo near the pond, and are hoping for lots of new residents as the weather warms. (We are currently looking to source guano to encourage new tenants - if anyone has a stash available please let us know!)

## President's Letter: Striking Growth, 2025 Highlights



*By Bill Hopple, Board President*

Cardinal now protects 11,500 acres of natural, agricultural and open lands in 20 counties of SW Ohio and SE Indiana!! Last year we had many accomplishments- the most significant are listed.

All of this was made possible by 550 generous donors who provided \$1,049,677 through contributions, grants, project fees and events. The most striking increase came from contributions: 539 donors gave \$511,486 – a 10% increase in donors and **59% in amount given compared to 2024!**

Cardinal has just completed its tenth year since our creation. In 2015, we could not have imagined the scale of our operation today. Many factors have contributed to our growth, but the one that stands out is community support! I cannot overstate the Board's appreciation for the generous support Cardinal Land Conservancy has received every year. Be on the lookout for our Ten-Year Report document, which you will receive digitally in the coming weeks.

- Joined forces with Oak Heritage Conservancy in Indiana
- Opened our Community Conservation Hub in the City of Cincinnati
- Signed Memoranda of Understanding with: Cincinnati Civic Garden Center, Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden and University of Cincinnati – C4Health (Cincinnati Center on Climate Change and Health).
- Hired a Director of Operations and reorganized staff into three departments (Conservation, Philanthropy and Operations)

With deep appreciation, Bill Hopple - Board President

# Preserving Working Lands

*By Andy Dickerson, Executive Director*

Cardinal Land Conservancy was built through collaboration—quite literally. Over the years, four land trusts came together to form Cardinal: Citizen’s Land Conservancy of Hamilton County, Clinton County Open Lands, Southern Ohio Farmland Preservation Association, and most recently Oak Heritage Conservancy in Indiana. What united each of these organizations was a shared commitment to protecting working lands and the people who steward them.

In my first decade at Cardinal, I’ve had the privilege of working with remarkable farm families—individuals who care deeply about their land and are dedicated to keeping it productive for generations. These are exactly the kinds of farms worth conserving.

We protect farmland through agricultural easements. Whether purchased (often at a discounted rate) or donated, an easement ensures the land remains a farm forever—it cannot be subdivided or developed. Just as important, Cardinal does not tell farmers how to operate their farms. We don’t dictate what they grow or how they farm. It’s their land and their livelihood.

To uphold these permanent agreements responsibly, Cardinal sets aside dedicated funds for each conserved

farm in our Long-Term Stewardship Fund. These resources allow us to monitor and protect every easement in perpetuity. Stewardship funding typically comes from the landowner, either through easement purchase programs such as the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program or as a cash contribution at the time of an easement donation. In donation cases, we encourage farm families to consult with tax or accounting professionals to fully understand the potential financial benefits of donating a legal interest in their property.

In recent years, Cardinal has sharpened its focus on Ecologically Sound Agriculture. We prioritize farms practicing regenerative agriculture or producing food for local consumption.

Regenerative practices rebuild soil health, return carbon to the ground, and increase long-term productivity. Tools like cover crops, no-till planting, grassed waterways, and riparian buffers benefit farmers while also improving water quality, supporting wildlife, and strengthening the land.

We’re known for saving the last great places. Just as importantly, we’re committed to saving the last great farms—and we believe the future of conservation lies in farms that are both productive and ecologically sound.



**The ACRES Society** is Cardinal Land Conservancy’s planned giving society, recognizing individuals who have made a lasting commitment to conservation through a gift in their will, trust, or estate plans. ACRES members help ensure that working farms, natural areas, and ecologically sound landscapes remain protected forever. By including Cardinal in your legacy plans, you become part of a community dedicated to conserving the last great places—and farms—for generations to come. *To learn more about planned giving or the ACRES Society, contact our Director of Philanthropy at [Lauren@CardinalLandConservancy.org](mailto:Lauren@CardinalLandConservancy.org)*



# CONSERVATOR

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## Bonnie and Clyde: Eagles Thrive Inside City Limits

*By Andy Dickerson, Executive Director*

Bonnie and Clyde have become local celebrities—and for good reason. This remarkable bald eagle pair has a well-documented history at Cardinal’s **Bortz Family Nature Preserve**, located at the mouth of the Little Miami National Wild and Scenic River in Cincinnati’s East End.

When Cardinal first began working with Neil and Arn Bortz to protect this property, we knew it was special. As one of the largest forested, undeveloped parcels left within Cincinnati’s city limits—and bordered by two major rivers—it was an easy “yes.” What we *didn’t* know at the time was that an active bald eagle nest was tucked away on the property.

The preserve is rich with biodiversity. Several state-listed plant species grow here, including **riverbank paspalum** and **smooth buttonweed**. The surrounding waters are just as impressive, home to **silver lamprey** and the **wartyback mussel**, both listed species in Ohio.

Cardinal acquired the property in 2020, and since then Bonnie and Clyde have proven to be outstanding parents. For their first three years, they successfully raised **three eaglets each season**. One year broke the pattern: although Bonnie laid three eggs, only two hatched. In a tough but well-documented behavior, the older eaglet outcompeted the younger for food, and only one fledgling survived that year. The following two seasons, Bonnie laid two eggs, and both eaglets fledged successfully each time.

If you haven’t visited **Bortz Family Nature Preserve**, it’s well worth the trip. The preserve offers a rare



**Bonnie and Clyde prepping the nest for the 2026 clutch. These hardy birds are not phased by a little (or a lot) of snow. Eggs are usually laid around Valentines Day.**

sense of forested seclusion right inside the city. A one-mile gravel trail winds through the woods and is easily accessible when the Ohio River is below 36 feet. Spring migration brings fantastic birding opportunities, and after a hike, the nearby businesses at Four Seasons Marina make a perfect spot to relax, grab a bite, and enjoy the river views. We do however request that visitors be respectful of their space and do not seek out the nest while exploring the preserve.

Keep up with the 2026 clutch by watching the live streaming Eagle Cam on Cardinal’s website. The Eagle Cam operates thanks to our committed Cam Keepers who sponsor annual maintenance, equipment replacement, streaming costs and preserve maintenance. Cam Keepers also get the opportunity to visit the nest on a guided tour each year and help select names for the eaglets. You can learn more about becoming a Cam Keeper on the Eagle Cam webpage.

We look forward to what this season will bring!

# Bahr Farm Growing in Popularity

*By Nick Hartley, Facilities Manager, Bahr Farm*

Our small but dedicated team accomplished an extraordinary amount of work in 2025. Alongside the day-to-day essentials, staff built thousands of feet of new fencing to strengthen our rotational grazing system while successfully completing an NRCS grant. Our hayfield yielded nearly six tons of hay, enough to feed our cattle through the winter. We even rented a bull over the summer (more on that in the spring newsletter).

The farm is always buzzing with activity: Our Harvest customers picking up produce, staff coming and going throughout the day, and gardeners checking on their rented plots. Yet even that activity was eclipsed by the nearly **700 people** who came to Bahr Farm in 2025 for tours, field trips, and events. Visitors ranged from local painters seeking inspiration to Seed Commons, which brought dozens of international cooperative workers to tour the farm during their time in Cincinnati.

We were also able to do meaningful outreach beyond the farm gates. One standout moment was speaking to a group of third graders from Pleasant Hill Academy during their



**A group of visitors tours one of the farm's restored pastures.**

career day. Watching their excitement as they learned that a working cattle farm exists just down the street from their school was truly unforgettable.

As we head into 2026, we're excited to build on this momentum. Bahr Farm will continue to offer tours, host field trips for local schools, and support student and scout projects—and we'd love your ideas.

What kinds of experiences would *you* like to have? Please contact us at [Nick@CardinalLandConservancy.org](mailto:Nick@CardinalLandConservancy.org) with ideas or opportunities for your group to come experience the magic of our more-than-200-year-old urban farm.



**The Cincinnati chapter of Reinventing Civic Commons enjoys lunch after a farm tour and our cows feast on pollinator-friendly pasture hay on a snowy day.**



## *Our Mission*

Preserve natural habitats, waterways, agricultural lands, and open space we love in our tri-state region.

## *Affiliations*

Land Trust Alliance  
[www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org)  
Coalition of Ohio Land Trusts (COLT):  
[www.ohiolandtrusts.org](http://www.ohiolandtrusts.org)

## *Board of Directors*

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## *Connect with Cardinal!*

**Website**  
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**Facebook**  
[Facebook.com/CardinalLandConservancy](https://www.facebook.com/CardinalLandConservancy)

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930 O'Bannonville Rd.  
Loveland Ohio 45140

# A Day of Exploring at Hilltop Farm Preserve, IN

*By Madeline Banks, Conservation Coordinator*

The conservation team is getting boots on the ground at our new preserves from Oak Heritage Conservancy in Indiana, and learning about the land, ecosystems, and our neighbors. We began site visits in January 2026 with Hilltop Farm Preserve.

Hilltop Farm Preserve boasts 119 acres of woodland and restored prairie habitat. A roughly 3-mile trail system takes visitors through the forest, across a stream, and around lush tall grasses and forbs which will be on full display in the summer. We began our day in the small parking lot marking the trailhead. As we walked, we thought about what this place looks like in the spring and what our land management plans will require in the coming seasons. We met a friendly neighbor on the trail who told us this preserve is well-loved.

As we tramped through the woods and fields, we collected reference photos, and even sent up our drone for aerial imagery. These images contribute to baseline data which will help us compare changes to the landscape through the seasons and years to come, a requirement to maintain accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance.

We took every opportunity to bird watch, identify plants, and even look at scat to learn which animals were frequenting the same path we were on. It should come as no surprise to anyone that land trust staff are huge nature enthusiasts! This visit was more than just an excuse to find cool things outside. It gave us an opportunity to "stop and smell the roses" which provides more insight into the story of the land. We can't wait to visit again and see what the other Indiana preserves are like!



An aerial shot of Hilltop Farm Preserve and CLC staff on site.



## Richard Writes: Nurtured by Nature!

*By Richard Stoll, Board Member*

Be honest: How much time do you spend online each day? The internet has become central to us in our daily lives with 9 in 10 U.S. adults going online every day!

The global trend towards staying connected online



Photo credit: Jennifer Stoll

means many of us are spending less and less time outdoors. Researchers continue to compile evidence of the value of getting out into the natural world. Nature has been proven, time and time again, to reduce depression, anxiety, stress, and anger, as well as boost general psychological well-

being. Being in nature can help you clear your head, de-stress, and relax which can improve many areas of your life. Additionally, being in green spaces can boost the immune system, improving your ability to fight off infection.

Spending time in nature can be awe inspiring. The feeling that the world is so much bigger than you can lead to "expansive thinking" which allow us to consider different perspectives and can lead to innovative ideas. Playing in nature helps a child's development by improving physical health, enhancing social-emotional development and increasing their motor skills. Nature helps a child to be confident and also can make them feel happier.

Even in the cold and snowy winter, you can still enjoy nature. Just slow down and engage your senses (look, listen, feel and smell) and you'll notice the winter beauty all around you. Nature is a place for reflection and a place where you can slow down and process everything going on in your life. So seek out your local nature preserve and take in all that nature has to offer.



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**A new neighborhood has been built at Cardinal's home base in Loveland, but it's not the kind of neighborhood you're picturing. The residents probably look different too... learn more in the story below.**

## A New Home for Valuable Pollinators and Pest Managers

*By Brian Wintz, Land Steward*

Amid the ongoing housing affordability crisis, Cardinal Land Conservancy is doing our part by developing a brand-new condo complex... for bats!

Thanks to the hard work and vision of Eagle Scout Liam Knight, along with countless community volunteers and Cardinal's stewardship crew, a new bat condo now stands tall at our Loveland headquarters. The impressive structure rises nearly 18 feet above the ground, overlooking the pond near our main offices.

Perfectly situated between a newlyseeded native prairie and an adjacent woodland, the bat condo provides ideal habitat for an estimated 2,000–3,000 bats. This location offers shelter, proximity to water, and abundant foraging opportunities—everything our nocturnal neighbors need to thrive for years to come.

From early planning and design to the final installation, this project has been over two years in the making. We're incredibly proud to see it completed and standing as a permanent landmark at Cardinal's Loveland home.



A heartfelt thank-you goes out to everyone who contributed time, expertise, and enthusiasm to make this project possible. Special thanks to Madison Tree Care & Landscaping for generously donating crane services that helped us get this ambitious project across the finish line.