



Volunteer Land Steward Guide

Stewardship: noun, stew·ard·ship

1. wise care of the lands entrusted to us

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with Little Traverse Conservancy. VOLUNTEER LAND STEWARDS are vital to our mission: *to protect the natural diversity and beauty of northern Michigan by preserving significant land and scenic areas, and fostering appreciation and understanding of the environment.*

With almost 400 nature preserves and working forest reserves totaling more than 25,800 acres (as of June 2023) our service area includes Chippewa, Mackinac, Emmet, Cheboygan, and Charlevoix counties. Our lands are open to the public, and we rely on volunteers to help us care for these properties. Volunteer land stewards help us determine where to focus our attention and how to prioritize our work. The cumulative reports they submit help us make future management decisions.

Ideally, a land steward lives near the LTC property and visits it regularly. We encourage volunteers to visit the property as often as they like, but there are a few things that are required as detailed in this guide. Tasks which land stewards can help with include:

- Seasonal Trail Maintenance
- Rules Monitoring
- Boundary Monitoring
- Sign and Map Maintenance
- Ecological Inventory
- Reporting to LTC
- Ambassadorship



Land Stewards Dan and Linda
CasaSanta at the Hoogland Family

RULES FOR PUBLIC USE

We allow the public onto all of our lands, even the ones without parking areas or trails. However, there are certain permitted or prohibited activities on our lands:

YES

- * hiking
- * snowshoeing
- * mountain biking
- * cross country skiing
- * fishing
- * bird watching
- * berry picking & mushrooming
- * photography
- * dogs (most properties) on a leash at all times
- * hunting (some of our lands) by written permission through our website
- * other non-motorized activities

NO

- * camping/overnight use
- * removal of plants
- * trash dumping
- * fires
- * snowmobiles/ORVs
- * deer baiting
- * firewood removal
- * other motorized vehicles

PRESERVE MANAGEMENT

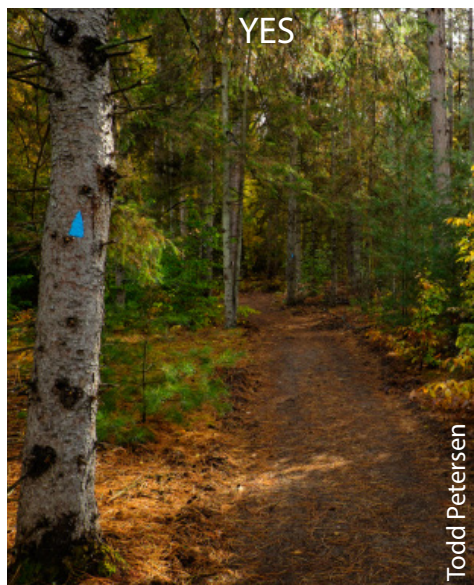
A management plan is created for each preserve or working forest reserve (WFR) owned by the Little Traverse Conservancy. These plans take into account size, habitats, neighboring land use, and suitability for recreational and educational activities. In general, LTC's land management style calls for minimal intervention on our properties. However, on some lands management activities may include maintenance of field or meadow habitats by mowing or haying, maintenance of scenic views, timber management, habitat restoration, erosion control projects, and invasive species monitoring and control. Commercial forest operations occur periodically on our WFR lands. If a special project is planned for your property, we will try to let you know about it ahead of time.



Tree planting at the Consuelo Diane & Charles L. Wilson Jr. WFR

TRAIL MONITORING AND MAINTENANCE

Trail maintenance techniques will be reviewed with you during a land steward orientation. We expect that land stewards are motivated independently throughout the year to visit the property and clear trails of downed trees (with a chainsaw if properly trained) and if not, to alert LTC that the trails need our attention). In addition, if the Conservancy gets a report from a trail user that maintenance is needed, or if a storm blows through, the steward may be called to check out the trail and clear it if necessary.



TRAIL CLEARING

- Cut trees as close to the ground as possible and, if cutting trees in winter, return in summer and cut them closer to the ground. Remove stumps from the treadway of the trail by digging out with axe.
- Cut limbs flush with the tree trunk; cut the underside of a limb first then cut from the top to avoid bark peeling off.
- Cut branches high enough on the tree that the trail will be clear even with 3' of snow on the ground and with evergreen branches weighed down with snow.
- Stash cuttings out of sight and with end facing away from trail, roll logs away from trail.

CHAINSAW SAFETY PROTOCOL

Chainsaw operation is dangerous. We require that land stewards only use a chainsaw if:

- You have 5+ years of experience or have completed a chainsaw safety training in the past 5 years
- Work with a safety buddy
- Wear safety equipment including chainsaw chaps, ear and eye protection, closed toed boots, and a helmet (this protective equipment may also be borrowed from LTC if returned promptly)
- LTC periodically hosts a chainsaw safety training free of charge to volunteers.



SIGNS AND STRUCTURES

The property may include informational items like trail maps, interpretive signs, or dedication/memorial plaques. Trails are marked with blue painted triangles. Please notice if they are fading, unclear, or degraded in any way.

Other things to keep an eye on and observe the condition of are logo signs, parking areas, fences, boardwalks, interpretive signs, platforms, bridges, stairways, vehicle barricades, and sign posts. Please notice if any are rotten, broken, flooded or pose unsafe conditions (slippery surface, loose railings, etc.)



Logo signs can quickly become obscured by branches and lichen or broken by fallen trees.



Volunteers build the fence at the Chaboiganing Nature Preserve.

SIGNS AND STRUCTURES continued

ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES

These may include parking area fences, boardwalks, interpretive signs, platforms, bridges, stairways, vehicle barricades, and sign posts. Please notice if any are rotten, broken, flooded or pose unsafe conditions (slippery surface, loose railings, etc.).



Trailhead kiosks welcome people to our most popular trails.



Metal trail maps guide hikers at each trail intersection.



Rules signs are posted at trailheads and boundaries, like this one placed by volunteer land steward Tom O'Halleran at the Cedarville Bay Nature Preserve.



Blue trail blazes lead the way.



Memorial benches are common along trails.

BOUNDARY MONITORING

To truly know what is happening on our lands, we must keep an eye on our boundaries. Many boundaries are unmarked because the cost of getting a survey can be prohibitive. Fortunately, GPS units and smart phones make it easy to follow an unmarked property line while bush-whacking.



Garmin GPS Unit
(can borrow
from LTC).



Download the ArcGIS Field Maps App on your smart phone to record land features and walk the property boundary using your phone's GPS navigation. This data will go directly to LTC!



"Carsonite" boundary markers are placed at property corners where there is a survey pin.

Walking the outer boundary of your preserve once a year is essential to maintaining our natural areas as "preserved" lands. We sometimes see trash dumping, illegal hunting blinds, or yard maintenance happening on our lands on these walks. It is important that we ensure our boundaries are respected.

We also often find unexpected treasures that make boundary walking worth the effort, such as this glacial boulder deposited on the Mertaugh Family Nature Preserve in Cedarville.



REPORTING YOUR OBSERVATIONS

We ask you to report back to us on the condition of all the above categories a minimum of once in spring and once in fall. In the event that you observe inappropriate activity such as ORV use occurring on a property please note as much information as possible including: descriptions of person(s) or vehicle, license plate numbers, date and time, and then notify us as soon as possible. We prefer that land stewards do not confront violators. Instead, we encourage stewards to contact us by phone or email if an issue needs immediate attention.

COMMUNICATIONS

An annual Volunteer Stewardship Newsletter is sent to stewardship volunteers in the spring. We host an annual volunteer appreciation luncheon, usually in June, to which all Preserve Steward and EcoStewards volunteers are invited. Volunteer Preserve Stewards are also welcome to join us for our seasonal community field trips, and invited to share their knowledge or special skills if they would like to lead one of these field trips.

OTHER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Special work days, such as trail building, cleanup of new preserves, tree planting, and other preserve tasks take place throughout the year. Let us know if you would like to be added to our Project Volunteer list and we will send you email updates about these events. Citizen science volunteer opportunities, such as vernal pool monitoring or kestrel nest box monitoring, are also available through our EcoStewards volunteer program.



A bear climbed this beech tree at the Clyde & Martha Williams Preserve on Drummond Island.

eBird

Volunteers can record bird observations at any LTC property through the eBird smart phone app.



Help us document and identify the wonders of your protected property at [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org) or download the iNat app on your smart phone.

CITIZEN SCIENCE & ECOSTEWARDS

Citizen science efforts enable LTC to learn what is on the land and what we are protecting. Whether you have special skills in birding, field surveying, carpentry, or want to learn a new skill, you can get involved. Volunteer opportunities include vernal pool monitoring, forest health surveys, and kestrel nest box monitoring through LTC's EcoStewards Volunteer Program. Other ways you can help are to conduct a bird or bat survey, host a bioblitz or invasive species removal party on our lands. Bring us your passion, your ideas and your friends and we can put you to work!



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