



WAWASEE AREA CONSERVANCY FOUNDATION

# CONSERVANCY VIEWS

Protecting our watershed through **AWARENESS, ANALYSIS** and **ACTION**.

Spring 2025



Photo credit: Larry Baumgardt

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# A Labor of Love

By J. Terry Clapacs, Board Chair

In 2009 I was invited to serve on the WACF Board. It was my first year in retirement and I was searching for a philanthropic organization to help fill the new freedom and time available not previously enjoyed during work life. My wife, Phyllis, and I purchased a home on Syracuse Lake in 2002, and we were anxious to return to summers in Northern Indiana where we had both grown up: she in Elkhart and me in Goshen.

At the time I knew little about WACF but understood the Board was interested in having representation from Syracuse Lake. The learning curve was steep at first as the mission and past success of WACF became clear. What a surprise. The pursuit of water clarity carries many sub initiatives including identification of trouble spots and then remediation as appropriate. Land acquisition was a big shock. WACF has acquired more than 1,000 acres of property including ten miles of shoreline, all necessary to protect and preserve the Wawasee Watershed. Education is an important goal of WACF, and the Board's Education Committee touches the lives of hundreds of young residents in our public schools by providing programming during the summer that conveys lessons not found in traditional school environments. WACF monitors Indiana General Assembly Legislation that affects the State's natural resources. We apply for grants through various funding agencies and then put those grant proceeds to work on specific projects that facilitate our mission.

Yes, we raise funds and our friends around the lakes are extremely generous with their support. Annual giving has exceeded \$1M each of the past few years enabling our water testing program to become a model for freshwater lake stewardship. The WINS study (Wawasee Inlets Nutrient Study) has provided a mountain of information that will now guide our focus and spending patterns. Data on the effect Dillon Creek, Turkey Creek, and Martin Creek have on the Wawasee Watershed has been collected and organized in a way that drives our ongoing battle with phosphorus. Agricultural runoff is always going to be a primary concern. Our response has been to reach out to the farming community and establish partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Except for a one-year hiatus it has been my pleasure to serve on the WACF board of Directors since that initial appointment sixteen years ago. My two-year term as Chairman of the Board will soon end. My previous work life provided many opportunities to be part of various boards and commissions, but nothing compares to the sense of satisfaction received from association with WACF. It is and always will be a labor of love.

We live in a special place. If you are interested in becoming part of the WACF team please contact Heather Harwood at the World Headquarters located on south State Road 13, Syracuse, Indiana



## Prescribed Burn—Conklin Bay Wetlands

By WACF Wetland Committee

Residents and passing motorists near the Conklin Bay wetlands, north of Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation, may have noticed smoke billowing out from a small section of the Conklin Bay wetlands in a designated area between the trails boardwalk and SR 13, Wednesday, April 23.

"The site underwent a "restoration," which returns a degraded wetland to its more natural state," explains Steve Coyle, WACF volunteer. These methods can be accomplished by mowing and burning dried plants.

WACF has partnered with Blue Heron Ministries (BHM), the esteemed environmental consultants, for a five-year contract. The company is renowned for its expertise in restoring several wetlands by conducting prescribed burns. BHM Director Nate Simons said, "Prescribed burns are critical to successful restoration projects because they prepare the site for our native plant seeds to flourish."

The plan was strictly regulated by state fire codes, which ensured the site's safety and the surroundings. These codes included on-site safety measures approved by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management. This method confined the fire to the site and ensured it burned the plants and nothing else.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Indiana Department of Natural Resources acknowledged the significance of this restoration project. They recognized the benefits of restoring this small, confined site as a demonstration project. Scott Feters, USFWS biologist, explained, "Wetland restorations create an amazing habitat of native plants, which attract more diverse birds, insects, and other wildlife."



After the burn, surviving native plants will be supplemented by seeding with desirable plants such as native cattail, swamp loosestrife, swamp hibiscus, arrowhead, pickerel weed, and bur-reed. Conklin Bay wetland is a typical marsh that has degraded from its natural state of diverse plants to only a few dominant species over time.

Restoring this portion of the Conklin Bay Wetland marsh habitat to its natural state will ensure better water quality for future generations. This demonstration project will provide lessons on rehabilitating degraded wetlands on a larger scale in the future.

# From the Executive Director:

By Heather Harwood, Executive Director

Thank you for your support providing WACF with the opportunity to apply for and participate in projects across our watershed. WACF continues to pursue work guided by science to protect water quality:

**Native tree plantings**—this spring 800 trees were planted as a part of the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) thanks to our partners at the NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service) and USDA.



Wayne and JW Stanger plant trees at the Education Center

Since 2004, WACF has planted over 15,000 trees. Wetland restoration, invasive plant removal and timber stand improvement has been made possible through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and EQIP including work at WACF's Wilson Farm, Beck Conservancy Enclave, Bushong Preserve, Turkey Creek and Turkey Creek Inlet Preserve, Dillon Creek, Zimmerman Preserve at Johnson Bay Wetland, Bayshore Ponds, Martin Creek, and the Audubon property.

**Dredging** — was completed from runoff into Wawasee's lakebed from the Crow's Nest Development. To see a short video of the dredging and dump site of the runoff, you can view it on our Facebook page. The dredging removed 320 cu yards of sediment that was identified in a dredging study of the lakebed by ECI. The material was then offloaded and taken to a nearby WACF property in over 20 dump truck loads.

- **Last year the Board completed a Strategic Plan review.** Looking to support the Pillars of the Plan outlining Goals, Strengths, Opportunities, Challenges and Resources. WACF Pillars include:
  - Partnership - Leadership
  - Restoration – Remediation
  - Research – Monitoring
  - Education
  - Land Acquisition and Management
- **Engineering Feasibility Study (EFS) and Dillon Creek Tributary project construction** — the EFS identified problem areas in Martin Creek, Turkey Creek, and Dillon Creek sub-watersheds and provided construction drawings to stabilize Dillon Creek Tributary. Funds for the EFS were awarded by the IDNR Lake and River Enhancement (LARE), and by the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership for construction of those plans.
- **Aquatic weed treatment this year showed a fairly stable population of Eurasian Watermilfoil. Starry Stonewort** continues to be an aggressive threat to our lakes and channels. Starry Stonewort is in Wawasee, around much of Syracuse Lake's perimeter, and was also discovered in Knapp Lake at the top of our watershed in the 10-lake chain.
- **The US Fish and Wildlife Service continues to partner** with WACF on invasive plant removal and habitat restoration at the Hinrichs Waterfront Park.
- **The Annual Farm Tour**, led by Russell Anderson, is always informative with an impressive presentation of technical information on farming on July 30, at 9:30am.
- **Lake Talk and Eats** continues the first Saturdays of June (Native Plant Sale), July (Bug Catch), and August (Pontoon Tour).
- **Fishing with the DNR** — the first Wednesday of July at Between-the-Lakes, 9-11am, for kids to catch and hold fish in our aquarium.
- **Between-the-Lakes Kayak Kiosk** — Thank you to Larry and Pam Palmer for their donation for a kayak launching site at the Between-the-Lakes property on Main Channel at Mud Lake. The kiosk will open
- **Our 34th Birthday Celebration will be Saturday, July 30, 9am at the Between-the-Lakes Buletty Pavilion** - Check out our website for details on this event. Come and tour the Quinn Log Cabin and the historical furnishings.

- **Trails are open dawn until dusk** at Syracuse Lake Wetlands, The Turkey Creek Overlook, the Zimmerman preserve on Black Point Road and the WACF Education Center.



John Bearss and Jim Silcox, WACF Canoe Trip leaders

- **Friday morning canoe trips resume mid-June.** A big thank you to the WACF volunteers who make these trips happen: John Bearss, Jim Silcox, Tom Madru, Greg Arnott, Julie Mark, Dan and Marilyn Berkey and Doug Hines.

The WACF Board and Staff thank you all for your support. And thank you to all our great volunteers who help with our maintenance mowing and trimming, canoe trips, educational events. We can't do it without you!

**WACF mission:**  
To protect and enhance water quality and natural attributes in the Wawasee area watershed through water related land acquisition, educational programming, and scientifically informed action to preserve the lakes for future generations.



# WINS in Action

By Beth Morris, Ecology Chair

Did you know that all lakes have a life cycle, just like we do? In the case of Lake Wawasee, it was “born” when the last glaciers receded, about 15,000 years ago. Lake life cycles are centuries long, but what we humans do on the land around them and how we use the lakes can accelerate the aging process. The biggest threat to any lake is the sediment and nutrients, mainly phosphorus and nitrogen, that come into the lake and stay there. Phosphorus and nitrogen are key ingredients for plant and algae growth. Excessive quantities can increase aquatic weed infestation and, in worst case scenarios, lead to harmful algal blooms. This process of a lake’s aging and degradation in water quality is known as eutrophication. WACF’s main objectives involve taking action to slow this natural process.

## What is WINS?

In 2019, the Wawasee Inlets Nutrient Study (WINS) was initiated, an investment to scientifically characterize the amount of nutrients and sediment flowing into and staying in the lake from each of the four inflows, before exiting the lake at the Turkey Creek Dam. The WINS purpose was to establish a baseline for measuring progress on protecting the watershed and a means for prioritizing areas for remediation projects. The first five years of WINS involved intensive April through June, sampling each inflow and the Turkey Creek outflow every four hours due to the planting season in the surrounding farmland. This was done using highly sophisticated automated gauge stations. For the remaining nine months of the year, each inflow/outflow was sampled weekly. Our colleagues at Ecosystems Connections Institute statistically analyzed the data annually and established the baseline for measuring progress over time.

Using the massive database of 77,796 data points from WINS Years 1-5, ECI created a model that dramatically reduced the number of samples taken and still accurately estimated annual nutrient loading from each inflow. WINS Year 6, 2024, was our first year of reduced testing.

## WINS 2024 Key Findings

The WINS data clearly shows that sediment and phosphorus are the biggest concerns to protect and maintain our lake’s health. The amount of water entering the lake in any given year is an important driver of nutrient and sediment loading. Phosphorus binds to clay particles and moves with the sediment into streams and lakes during rain events when soil erodes from upland areas, streambanks or even construction sites.

Precipitation is the main driver of sediment and phosphorus movement. Rainfall intensity, amount, and time of year are key variables with a big impact. In the six years of WINS, the residency time, or how long a drop of water stays in the lake, has varied from 2.01 to 3.59 years, with an average of 2.24 years. A related measure is the flushing rate or the percent of water that is replaced every year. Over the four years, the Flushing Rate has ranged from 28% to 50% with an average of 43%.

As with the previous 5 years, Turkey Creek was the biggest source of sediment (49%) and phosphorus (39%) based on modeled data. Based on sub-watershed size, Martin Creek continues to be the highest source of phosphorus on a pounds/acre basis. In contrast, Dillon Creek’s contributions of phosphorus and sediment appear to be declining. While impossible to say why, it could be due to a combination of factors such as increased use of regenerative agriculture practices, completion of a WACF remediation project in the upstream portion of the creek in 2023, and improvement in agricultural practices on fields closer to the lake.

Phosphorus is the main culprit in a lake’s decline over time. Phosphorus concentrations in the lake are an excellent barometer of lake health, like taking one’s blood pressure. Over the last six years, Lake Wawasee’s in-lake phosphorus levels have been consistently in the Eutrophic stage. Meaning, that our lake is very “productive,” enabling plants and algae to flourish. It tells us that our lake, like all glacial lakes, are in a state of declining health and need proactive steps to keep them healthy.

## WINS Data Drives Action

The focus of WACF’s project work involves slowing the flow of incoming water to give phosphorus-carrying sediment time to settle out. The WINS data has provided a roadmap for prioritizing projects that reduce the incoming nutrients and sediment. The following is a recap of 2024 accomplishments:

**National Water Quality Initiative:** a USDA cost-share program for implementing farming conservation practices that improve soil health and water quality. In 2024, USDA funded six applications for a total exceeding \$672,000 that included 1,482 acres in cover crops (covering approximately 14% of agricultural land in our watershed).

**Dredging project by Crow’s Nest:** The dredging removed 320 cu yards of sediment that was identified in a dredging study of the lakebed by ECI. The material was then offloaded and taken to a nearby WACF property in over 20 dump truck loads.

**Lake And River Enhancement (LARE) Engineering Feasibility Study:** Four “hot spot” areas identified by WINS were evaluated for potential future remediation/restoration projects. Final engineering design and permits were completed for WACF’s recently acquired property on Dillon Creek tributary near Enchanted Hills. Engineering concepts were identified for other areas, and we are pursuing funding for their future detailed design and implementation

A targeted restoration and remediation project, the Dillon Creek tributary project mentioned above includes stabilizing 640 feet of streambank, removing invasive species, constructing riffles to slow the water, and regrading an existing grassed waterway in the adjacent farm field. A grant from the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership is being used to start this project in 2025. Annually, it will prevent 14.1 tons of sediment, 12.1 pounds of phosphorus, and 24 pounds of nitrogen from entering the lake! Additionally, the adjacent highly sloped field, previously planted in row crops, is now rented by WACF to a farmer who planted it with alfalfa year-round, providing further protection from sediment runoff.

We all must continue to be vigilant and proactive to protect our beautiful lakes. WACF is committed to using scientifically informed action to preserve the lakes for future generations!



# WACF Announces Completion of Crow's Nest Dredging Activity

The Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation has announced the completion of remediation efforts to remove significant sediment deposits along the Crow's Nest area of the East Shore of Lake Wawasee. The sediment was deposited as a result of shoreline development activities beginning in 2021 that were not properly permitted by state and local authorities.

Working in concert with a group of affected homeowners led by Lake Wawasee resident Jim Marcucilli and bolstered by research from the EcoSystems Connections Institute (ECI) led by Dr. Jerry Sweeten, WACF supported activities to assess the damage and plan for removal of the sediment. Because of the significance of the event and its detrimental impact on the health and clarity of Lake Wawasee, WACF coordinated the remediation planning and removal of up to 6 inches of eroded sediment into the lake along the East Shore.



ECI completed a study on behalf of homeowners affected by the erosion in June of 2023 which surveyed the area and found that the sediment was disbursed as far as 750 feet south of the Crow's Nest development. After reviewing the study, WACF applied for necessary permits to remediate the damage.

In June of 2024 WACF received a Certificate of Approval from The Indiana Department of Natural Resources for Dredging an area comprising approximately 35,000 square feet of lake bottom to remove 325 cubic yards of sediment as identified in the ECI assessment. Dredging activities began on November 19th and was completed on November 26, 2024, with over 20 dump truck loads of sediment removed and placed on WACF property nearby.

The project was facilitated through fines assessed by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management which provided partial funding for the project. Funding to complete the project was provided by WACF. IDEM fines were directed to be paid to the Lilly Center for Lakes and Streams with those funds being dispersed to WACF for remediation efforts.

About the Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation: WACF protects, preserves, and enhances the Wawasee Area Watershed for present and future generations. Since its inception, WACF has focused on land acquisition, management, and education. It has protected over 1,000 acres of property within the watershed and over 10 miles of shoreline. On its properties, WACF has reconstructed wetlands, and designed and implemented sediment control measures. WACF has facilitated millions of dollars in grants supporting specific projects and activities aimed at limiting erosion and improving water quality in the Wawasee Area Watershed. Through its strategic investments and partnerships, WACF is working to take definitive action to prevent harmful materials from entering the watershed and improve water quality and the health of our lakes.



*Heron on Rocks, Larry Baumgardt*

## Think Glacial Rock This Summer

By Joan Szyal

It's that time of year we all look forward to—preparing for summer at the lake!

In addition to the usual activities, WACF and WPOA would like to remind homeowners to consider adding glacial rocks to their seawalls.

There are several benefits to placing the Rock in front of your existing seawall.

Glacial Rock reduces wave action and chop. The rocks dissipate the waves so they are not reflected in the lake. This results in a calmer lake, but it also improves water clarity. Seawalls without rocks deflect the waves and cause scouring of the lake bottom. This scouring of the lake bottom resuspended sediment and clouds the water.

Glacial rocks improve the environment and habitat for lake organisms. The rocks provide "a place to hide" for aquatic insects, which are then food for fish. I have seen this firsthand in front of my property, where the fish are more abundant and attract herons and even our beloved eagles.

Don't forget the rocks also deter muskrats from damaging your shoreline and lawn.

The rocks also provide a path for frogs and turtles to nest on the shore.

I have had glacial rocks for approximately 13 years. In addition to improving the lake's ecology, the sound of the water being dissipated through the rocks is calming and a major improvement to the sound of waves crashing into the seawall.

A misconception is that the rocks need to be restacked each year. In 13 years, I have only restacked mine twice, and I only occasionally need to clean debris from the rocks.

WACF has a list of contractors for placement of the stones with an estimated cost of \$50 to \$100 per linear foot

Please consider making this small step this summer toward improving our lake ecology!

# Event Season is kicking off

By Pam Schumm, Education Officer

The Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation (WACF) Education Team has had an incredible winter season, impacting local students and the community. Partnering with the Lilly Center for Lakes & Streams, they brought one of two Lake in the Library lessons to North Webster and Syracuse Elementary Schools, ensuring young learners gain valuable knowledge about our lakes. The Winter Lake Talk & Eats series was a huge success, with three well-attended programs—Winter at the Lake, Protect the Lake, and Edge of the Lake—earning rave reviews.

Our outdoor event season started with a cold spring day for our 5th Bird Walk. Thank you to Suzanne Beyeler and Greg Clark from the Tippecanoe Audubon Society for leading the group. WACF organized a field trip for 137 second graders from West Noble for the first time. Expanding field trips to West Noble Schools allows us to reach children from the upper part of the watershed.

Looking ahead, WACF has an exciting lineup of summer activities:

**Wetland Adventures** (June 3, 10, 17 & 24, 10 AM-Noon): Elementary kids and adults can enjoy woodland hikes, canoe scavenger hunts, and crafts.

## Lake Talk & Eats Series:

June 7 (9-11 AM): Native Plant Sale: The Dirt on Dirt—Enjoy a brunch with a mimosa bar, learn about soil health, and shop for native plants.

July 5 (9-11 AM): Bug Catch—Catch critters in the lake after a short presentation at Ruddell Pavilion. Dress to be in the water and wear water shoes. Nets are provided.

New! August 2 (7 PM) Ecology Pontoon Cruise (Limited to 50 people, \$15 per person): Hands-on water testing, weed identification, and a tour of WACF projects from the comfort of a pontoon, complete with snacks! The cruise will begin at the WACF pier at our Education Center.

Registration and event information at [wacf.com](http://wacf.com)

And remember to register your team for the 2nd annual Trivia Night, June 19th, hosted by Tiger Trivia! Gather your team, brush up on your general and ecological trivia, and prepare for a fun-filled evening supporting WACF Education.

With so many engaging opportunities, this season promises to be educational, interactive, and adventurous. Join us and be part of the movement to protect and celebrate our local waterways!



Photos by Rusty Martinez, Lilly Center for Lakes and Streams

## Record-breaking attendance at WACF's 10th Annual Earth Day Festival!

By Pam Schumm, Education Officer

The Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation's (WACF) Earth Day Festival on May 3, 2025, was a resounding success, marking its 10th annual celebration with a record turnout! Over 350 attendees gathered to enjoy a fun-filled day outdoors, engaging with 20 different vendors who offered a variety of interactive, educational, and creative experiences—all designed to promote environmental awareness and conservation.

Despite the cool, dry weather, spirits were high as families explored nature-themed activities and connected with experts. Each family received a free goodie bag, and kids could enter a T-shirt drawing by collecting stickers from each vendor. Congratulations to Quin, Maya, and Gemma, who each won a shirt!

Visitors had hands-on experiences making bird feeders, planting seeds in ice cream cones, learning about bees and monarchs, and even discovering local attractions with a Kosciusko County model. Participants could try their hand at art activities, including decorating an Earth Day headband, hanging a stamped wall, or watching

Dave Broerman demonstrate painting with the Plein Air Painters. Participants could try matching names and pictures of invasive plants, experience the obstacles during bird migrations, and observe runoff and invasive weeds or various insects. Most participants even made a clean water pledge!

Wood carvings of birds and fish, native plants, and handmade earrings were available. This year's festival introduced exciting new booths—participants created wind vanes, climbed into sailboats, tried their hand at casting into a target, matched butterflies to host plants, looked inside a beehive, decorated headbands, and designed their fish. They also created beautiful, stamped wall hangings. Live Well presented information about tobacco and vape juice in our wastes and waterways.

With so much enthusiasm and engagement, this Earth Day Festival showcased how community involvement can lead to real environmental impact. Thank you to everyone who joined in making this milestone event unforgettable! Mark your calendar for May 2, 2026, from 11 - 3! That will be the date for the Earth Day Festival 2026!

# Leaving a Legacy

By Bill McCully, Vice Chairman

This past February, while enjoying our annual visit to Florida, my wife and family (they were all there for several days!) threw a well-kept secret surprise party for me. It celebrated two events: my retirement from full-time work (I still dabble) and my 68th birthday. I was humbled and, indeed, very surprised. And perhaps a little emotional. In addition to some very generous gifts (mostly in bottle form...), the real treat was to hang out and celebrate with so many friends, most of whom share the common bond of a love of Lake Wawasee and the Wawasee Watershed. It was indeed Wawasee South! It made me pause and reflect on a life defined in so many ways by my time here at the watershed and the people who share my passion for it.

The combination of retirement and approaching my eighth decade on the planet spurred more than one moment of contemplating mortality and taking stock of the blessings of my life: My family, my friends, and the joys of growing up, spending summers, and now living here at the lake. Like you, our lakes have meant the world to me. Whether it's the crazy energy of a summer weekend, the silent solitude of a snow-covered frozen lake, or the amazing fact that I can call a nesting pair of Bald Eagles nextdoor neighbors, our watershed is a wonder. As I have thought about what it has meant to me, I think about what I can do to give back when my time comes.

Since joining the board of the WACF, I have been moved by the number of people who, when they think about how they wish to be remembered, choose to do so by including their love of the lake in their final wishes. The number of families who choose to encourage memorial donations to WACF on behalf of their loved ones and those who remember us in their estate planning is a special privilege and honor for those of us at WACF. If you would like to learn more about how you can continue your lake legacy, please reach out to us at WACF by emailing [info@wacf.com](mailto:info@wacf.com), visiting our new website at [www.wacf.com](http://www.wacf.com) or calling (574) 457-4549.

## Wawasee Legacy Society

### Estate Planning

## Make a gift today!

**To join please let us know of your plans to make provisions for WACF in your estate.**

Consider including WACF in your estate plan. Legacy gifts support essential needs and keep the conservancy operating and vital for years to come. Simply provide WACF with some form of written documentation. A letter or e-mail from the donor will suffice. Legacy Society Benefits Legacy Society members will be recognized for their sustained support and leadership. Their names will be forever etched on an appropriate memorial at the WACF Center.

## Planning for the next generation...

Planned gifts are a variety of charitable giving techniques that allow you to express your personal values to your charitable, family, and financial objectives. Making a planned charitable gift usually requires the WACF's development officer and/or your attorney, financial planner, or CPA to help structure the gift.

### Why make a planned or deferred gift?

- Make a larger charitable gift than you thought possible
- Provides more flexibility in giving opportunities
- Helps to meet personal and financial goals tailored to meet specific needs
- May help donors avoid capital gains tax
- Provides a way for donors to pass assets to families at a reduced tax cost
- May provide current tax benefits for future gifts
- Leave a charitable legacy for future generations



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[www.wacf.com](http://www.wacf.com)

