

SWMLC Stewardship Policy

Mission

The mission of the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy is to protect the diversity, stability, and beauty of southwest Michigan by preserving our natural and scenic lands. The mission of the Stewardship Committee is to manage SWMLC's preserves to advance these goals and to make preserves available to the public where appropriate.

Management Philosophy

The management of SWMLC's preserves will be guided by two principles: what is ecologically appropriate and what is feasible given the human and financial resources available. Management implies an explicit plan to maintain or move toward a particular desired ecosystem that will serve to promote regional biodiversity.

Management Plans

At the time of acquisition and periodically thereafter, each preserve will be inventoried and assessed as to its most appropriate use or value and then managed accordingly. The inventory will identify the preserve's natural communities and natural features, noting in particular uncommon species that SWMLC wishes to protect. Management plans may take many forms, ranging from "let nature take its course" non-interference, to active intervention. When possible, our management practices should be non-intrusive, and should mimic natural processes that have been suspended or altered by human activity. The Stewardship Committee will coordinate initial inventory and assessment of preserves with the Land Protection Committee. The two committees will consult to ensure the highest quality management plan possible with reference to sound conservation science and practices. Management plans will be reviewed periodically and revised as needed, based on changed conditions on the preserve or in the surrounding environment. All preserves will be actively monitored to prevent misuse, to observe the natural succession, and to evaluate our active management efforts.

Management Practices

One cannot specify all practices that might be appropriate in the future. In lieu of such a comprehensive statement, the following active management practices have been used or may be used in the future to promote diversity, stability, and beauty:

- Removing exotics by hand pulling small plants and cutting or chemically treating shrubs and trees in some circumstances.
- Controlled burning to maintain certain vegetation types, such as prairie plantings to augment (as appropriate) species that may appear naturally in a particular habitat.
- Allowing hunting as a management tool in extraordinary circumstances to control destructive wildlife.
- Establishing and maintaining parking, trails, and boardwalks for public access.
- Monitoring indices of habitat quality, e.g., water quality, and species diversity.
- Preparing and periodically updating species lists and descriptive brochures for the preserves.

Public Use of Preserves

The Stewardship Committee recommends to the Board of Directors the level of public use of each preserve, taking into account the donor's wishes. Some preserves will not be open to the public because of access difficulties, rare and endangered species, or fragile communities. At other preserves, public use will be encouraged as long as such usage does not adversely affect the integrity of the ecological system. In general, there are some public uses that will not be allowed on any preserve: recreational motorized vehicles, unrestricted camping/campfires, dumping, collecting of anything except with specific permission by SWMLC.

Signs and Parking

Boundary signs: Each preserve will have its boundary marked with small SWMLC signs. We will make this activity a high priority because encroachment from adjoining private property owners and misuse of any natural communities, features, or species is more likely to occur if boundaries are not located and marked.

Entrance signs: For those preserves where we wish to encourage broad public use, a large entrance sign will be put in place. The design of the sign must conform to the standards set by SWMLC.

Parking: Parking areas will be provided at the preserves most suitable for public use.

Donors and Stakeholders

Donors' wishes as regards management of a preserve will be considered and incorporated into the management plan as fully as possible without compromising SWMLC's basic objectives. The Stewardship Committee will inform donors and other stakeholders (e.g., members, neighbors, local officials) about projects on the preserve and encourage their participation in them.

