

THE OZARK HOLLER

Ozark Land Trust Newsletter

Fall 2025

OLT Highlights Our Favorite Places

Ozark Land Trust's tagline, Conservation Close to Home, points to the potent connection of people to their lands and those around them—the places where we live, work and play.

The memories of land are often forever etched in our hearts, and often shaped at a very young age.

A nearby community park or garden can become a life-defining green space. A walk by a lake, a paddle on a river, or even a small depression that becomes a neighborhood skating pond in winter, may provide a forever link to the tranquility of water. A forested hill with seemingly endless trees and undisturbed paths can

provide peace and serenity, a natural escape from our everyday existence.

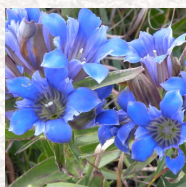
Our OLT staff, board, landowners and friends have made protection of our precious lands a priority, some as the centerpiece of their lives' work, others to give back to the beauty that has given them such comfort.

In this edition of the Ozark Holler, they tell us, through both words and pictures, of those experiences with the lands and waters that have helped create, nurture and affirm their love of our Ozark region.



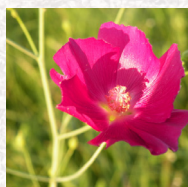
What's Inside:

Our Favorite Places pp. 2-5



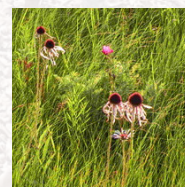
OLT Staff, Board members and landowners share their favorite Ozark places.

Our 2024-2025 Donors pp. 6-8



We recognize the generous gifts of those who contributed from 2024-2025.

Director's Compass p. 8



Executive Director Diana Sheridan shares her insights.

The Legacy of Acorn Brook Farm

A family's deep love for their land led to a lasting commitment

By Suzanne Bouchard, Conservation Easement Landowner

In Jefferson County, MO, lies a remarkable piece of land known as Acorn Brook Farm. Spanning 104 acres, this area is not only beautiful but also vital for wildlife.

Originally purchased by George and Christine Eichelsbach in the early 1940s, it is now proudly owned by their daughter, Suzanne Bouchard. Both Christine and Suzanne were deeply committed to protecting this beautiful valley.

They recognized the potential threats posed by development and made it their mission to keep the area pristine. A standout feature of this property is a large rock shelter.

Gregg Galbraith, who served as Executive Director at the time, once remembered his first visit: This extraordinary formation, along with the stunning valley, adds to what makes Acorn Brook Farm so special.

To safeguard this beautiful land, in 2006, Christine and Suzanne chose to place it in a conservation easement. This decision ensured that the land would remain untouched and be preserved for future generations.

Their commitment underscores the importance of caring for nature and demonstrates how one's dedication can create a lasting impact. Today, the Farm represents more than just

land; it is a promise made by Christine and Suzanne to protect our environment for years to come.



Eichelsbach two-story log cabin, built circa 1837. The cabin has been partially restored with a detached stone carriage house on the far side. Photo by Suzanne Bouchard

For The Fish

Protecting the Ozark ecosystems that sustain life below the surface

By Loring Bullard, member of OLT Board of Directors

Two OLT sites protect habitat for rare and endangered aquatic species: Moore Cave and Sarcoxie Cave.

In 1888, Ruth Hoppin, a school teacher from Michigan, crawled into Sarcoxie Cave. There, she found tiny, ghostly white fish. She netted a few, preserved them, and sent them to a zoologist at Harvard. He pronounced them a new species—the Ozark cave fish.

In 1991, cavers in Perry County, on Missouri's eastern edge, found small fish resembling the banded sculpins found in spring branches, but with smaller eyes.

Genetic testing confirmed that this was a separate species, the grotto sculpin, known only from five caves in Perry County. Both species are threatened by pollution in the recharge areas of their caves, such as pesticide use, land clearing, sinkhole dumping and habitat disturbance.

OLT will work with many partners to make sure these subterranean fish get a fighting chance at survival.

—Loring Bullard is a member of the OLT Board of Directors and author of many books, including "The Springs of Missouri."



Amblyopsis rosae (Ozark cavefish), found in Sarcoxie Cave.



Cottus specus (Grotto Sculpin), found only in Perry County, MO.

Preserving Nature's Beauty

Protecting sandstone glades and woodlands

By Abigail Lambert, OLT River Stewardship Manager

Not far from Onondaga Cave State Park in Crawford County, MO, the Edith Miller Conservation Easement protects 120 acres in the Meramec River watershed.

Edith's donation in 2011 enabled the protection of this beautiful and important sandstone glade and woodlands that contribute to the broader conservation goal of maintaining the ecological integrity of the Meramec River watershed.

I was initially reluctant to do this project, as it lacked river frontage, seemed relatively small and uninteresting, it lacked needed funding, and was a distance from my focus area of Huzzah Creek. And then I visited the property ... and was bewitched.

Every spring flower was in bloom, including dutchman's breeches, bird's foot violet, wild hyacinth, and many more. Then I came upon the showpiece, an outstanding, prehistoric-looking sandstone glade with water running through it from recent rain. I had never seen anything like it.

On a second trip, I saw many more wildflowers in bloom, prickly

pear, numerous box turtles (my favorite animal), including a mating pair, and a gorgeous spotted orb-weaver spider and its web. I knew that we had to help protect this property and the landowner, Ted Heisel, and MDC partnered to ensure protection of this jewel.



Left to Right: Abigail Lambert, Edith Miller and Ted Heisel

From Family Farm to Forever Park

Transforming historic farmland into a public park

By Scott Woodbury, Horticulturalist and Owner of Cacilia Garden Design

Woodland wildflowers and tall grass prairie don't just happen on their own. Especially nowadays, with bush honeysuckle aggressively taking over our woodlands and a lack of intentional fire.

The late Bill and Nancy Knowles (who gave Spring Bend to St. Charles County and a perpetual conservation easement to OLT) knew this. It kept them busy on weekends with friends and family



*Bill Knowles giving a wildflower walk in 2001.
Photo by Scott Woodbury*

working together, nurturing the land that Nancy's father tended through the early 20th century. Their role was simple: raise a family, inspire friends, and take care of the magnificent land that was given to them.

Now in the 21st century, the torch is being handed off again. This time to Saint Charles County, which (with the help of SWT Design) is getting ready to turn this isolated gem of nature, nestled along the Missouri River, into a public park. As the area is surrounded on three sides by residential neighborhoods, the park is of great interest to the neighbors, who need to take their steps.

And so, thanks to Bill and Nancy and Saint Charles County, public amenities are being prepared. Parking, bathrooms, and a covered pavilion with swinging benches will overlook the vast expanse of tallgrass prairie to accommodate visitors.

Walking paths will meander through the prairie, and briefly hover above it, to take advantage of long views across the Missouri River valley. A suspension bridge will allow visitors to walk through treetops and cross a deep valley, before arriving at a beautifully reconstructed prairie on the other side.

I love Spring Bend because it looks, smells, sounds, and feels wild and untouched, even though it was a working farm through much of the 1900s. I think (hope) that when visitors arrive, they will love it too, not just for the steps!

Finding My Way Back to Nature

Childhood adventures to conserving the Ozarks

By Alexis Robles, OLT Administrative Associate



Tanglevine Trail at MDC's Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center in Kirkwood, MO. Photo by Michelle Scherer

Growing up in Crestwood, MO, I spent my childhood outside from dawn to dusk—mud pies and stick forts were far more exciting than any toy.

In the early 2000s, without the pull of screens, my imagination ran wild. Daily walks with my mom through Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center and nearby parks grounded me, and even into middle school, those trails remained a constant.

In college, I realized nature helped regulate my emotions and reconnected me to that free-spirited inner child. I began leading friends on hikes and road-tripped to explore tougher terrain.

Today, I work as an administrator with Ozark Land Trust. I may not work directly with the land or landowners, but I get a front-row seat to the passion my team pours into this mission. Even the background work feels meaningful. My childhood sense of wonder still guides me—and it's why I believe the Ozarks, with all their beauty and history, are worth protecting forever.

Summers on the River

From fishing and horseback rides to exploring Huzzah Creek

By Melissa Early Ruwitch, Longtime friend of OLT

Catching hellgrammites and crawdads and tadpoles with my brothers and cousins while our parents had cocktails on the back of the antique truck buried in the gravel bar. Inner-tubing, kayaking, and riding horses in the river.

Walking upstream and downstream in search of arrowheads. Digging clay from the bank and sculpting in the sun. Finding rocks in the shapes of pizza slices, steaks, and cakes.

Doing crossword puzzles, snacking and chatting with friends and family.

Watching my kids and their friends learn to fish, skip rocks, swim and snorkel, build campfires, and identify frogs, birds, snakes, lizards, poison ivy, trees...

Watching our dogs jump from the banks and splash. Reading in the river with a cool spring bubbling up and surprising me on a hot day. Hiking back to the house, dinner on the porch, and games in the barn.



Watercress Spring

A sign of clean, cold spring water and the Ozarks' natural heritage

By Michelle Scherer, OLT Conservation Project Manager

When I'm walking a property for a prospective conservation easement, to complete our inventory of its important natural attributes, I'm never certain what I might find. On one Ozark property in the Huzzah Creek tributary of the Meramec River, in the cold of January, our team stumbled upon a spring at the base of a dolomite bluff, and we found watercress growing in the spring.

This finding was significant because the plant only thrives in the cold and relatively unpolluted waters like those that flow from the Ozark's many springs. Its presence is a sign of a consistent clean water source, which speaks to the special and historic nature of the land.

For generations, Ozark settlers and Missouri's indigenous peoples have foraged for watercress for its nutrient-rich food and medicinal properties(it has been known to prevent scurvy). These days, it might be regarded as a "super food."

In fact, our landowner partners make a special trip to their spring, to forage the watercress for their salad, soup, and sandwiches.



Photo by Michelle Scherer

Three Decades of Dedication

The story of Woods Prairie and OLT's conservation efforts

By Andy Thomas, Longtime Board Member, and former President

When I learned that what is now called Woods Prairie was for sale and at great risk for subdivision and development way back about 1998, I had only been on the Ozark Land Trust board for a year.

I had moved to Southwest Missouri just two years before and quickly became enamored with Ozark prairies, exploring every prairie preserve I could find in the region (turns out –there were actually very few). I also soon learned how incredibly fragile native prairie ecosystems were –and still are.

I knew I had to act to protect this exceptional prairie, and OLT was the perfect vehicle to accomplish this daunting feat. Fast forward nearly 30 years, and I can

look back proudly at what OLT(and many others) have done to protect and restore this amazing jewel.

While I may have been the Woods Prairie point person for many years, it was countless hardworking volunteers, generous donors, and risk-taking visionaries within OLT who made Woods Prairie's permanent protection a reality.



To view all the stories and images from this newsletter, scan the QR code to the left for more full-size photos.

Thanks to Our Generous Donors

We are so grateful to all those who continue to support Conservation Close to Home by making a gift to Ozark Land Trust. This list recognizes those who have given to us during 2024 and 2025 whose gifts were received as of November 7, 2025.

*Denotes our donors who contributed \$500+ during this period.

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Your contributions make a lasting impact on the Ozarks for generations. A gift today provides perpetual protection.

Director's Compass

By Diana L. Sheridan, Executive Director



It's easy to get lost in the deep hollers of the Ozarks. There are many tools an explorer can use to guide themselves home. Memory, the stars, the vegetation, even the sun; but nothing is more

reliable than a well-calibrated compass.

When navigating life's choices, our compass is calibrated by our life's experiences. Mine have been filled with the exploration of natural places. As a child, naturalist, teacher, water quality scientist, natural resource manager, mentor, and leader, my compass has been continually recalibrated by my experiences outdoors in the Ozarks. Water, working lands and natural areas guided me and paved a clear road to my new role as Executive Director of Ozark Land Trust.

As you read this edition of the Ozark Holler, you'll read about our OLT staff, board, and friends' favorite places, and in a variety of ways, each place tells the story of coming home. People are drawn to the natural places

of the Ozarks by their internal compass, a deep connection to something more than the science of calibrating a compass. It is in a human's composition to find a deep connection with nature. These stories from landowners, staff, and board members inspire and calibrate OLT's compass to steer us home.

In 2026, OLT's Board will embark on strategic planning. The last strategic plan was completed in 2021. Our mission will act as the Board's compass to guide their development of strategies to achieve the goals of OLT. We have already begun the process of collecting feedback from staff, Board members, and advisors, and we look forward to incorporating their ideas into the strategic plan.

We welcome additional feedback. Please contact Diana.Sheridan@ozarklandtrust.org if you would like to contribute ideas.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to each of you reading this issue. Your participation, commitment, interest, and support of OLT steer and fuel our steady progress. Guided by the compass of our mission, by calibration from the Board, and fueled by our supporters, OLT is dedicated to protecting and stewarding your favorite places, bringing Conservation Close to Home.

THE OZARK HOLLER

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