

Keweenaw LAND TRUST

Impact Report

October 2023-2024

Din Egen Woods, Photo by Jim and Anne Kalen

Executive Director Report

By Pat Toczydlowski, Interim Executive Director and Project Specialist

Sound Finances
Ethical Conduct
Responsible Governance
Lasting Stewardship

This past year has been one of transformations for the Keweenaw Land Trust beginning with the move to our Limerick Street office last fall, trading rent for equity in a fixed asset, but more importantly creating a better sense of identity and permanence in the community. This move has played out better than anticipated with the sense of community and joy that has formed around this space. Individual offices with doors, a welcoming meeting space, a kitchen, a yard for socializing and growing native plants, a garage for tools – and the exercise and fresh air we get mowing the yard and shoveling the stairs. Seriously, if you haven't visited, come to a first Friday KLTea Time or holiday open house to enjoy this space and the KLT community that fills it.

In May, we learned that KLT has been awarded another 5-year term of accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, a mark of distinction recognizing land trusts that demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to excellence, upholding the trust of the land trust community. This is not a transformation moment, but an ongoing commitment to excellence that cuts across ALL aspects of our work. As the lead on the KLT application, I can attest to the thoroughness of the process and offer my thanks to Sarah Naperala, a private consultant with extensive land trust experience, and a master of spreadsheets that kept us on track. The Commission reviews a great deal of material intended to document compliance with the Standards and Practices established by the Land Trust Alliance. Accreditation is transformation in that, at its heart, it represents intentionality in the way we do our work throughout and across years in a culture aimed at continuous improvement. Sustainability is a key element – making sure that institutional knowledge is transferable and that there are sufficient resources to sustain the organization.

This report highlights some key outcomes of that intentionality across the pillars of the KLT mission, those most visible and intended to benefit the community. Working behind the scenes to carry out this work is a pleasure and honor for me personally, and this year I doubled down on my commitment to this organization, also serving as Interim Executive Director. I commend the Board of Directors for their dedication and commitment to the search process, and thank them, along with my co-workers and family for making me feel so well supported during this transitional year. I am very excited to hand the reins over to B Lauer and again work more behind the scenes. In this transformation moment there is a great deal of positive energy in and around KLT and I am excited to see where B leads this organization.

Board Report

By Nancy Langston, President of the Board of Directors

The Keweenaw Land Trust Board of Directors is pleased to report on our major activities in 2024. This has been a year filled with transition, enthusiasm, and great energy. We are deeply committed to serving you--our members, community partners, and the western Upper Peninsula-- in protecting land, water, and quality of life through conservation, stewardship and nature connections.

One of the highlights this year was the member survey, conducted with the invaluable assistance of our new staff member B Lauer. The survey gathered feedback on key areas including the desired qualities for our new Executive Director, conservation priority themes, and ways to improve communication with our members through emails, newsletters, and social media. Additionally, we sought input on trails, parking, signage, outings, and volunteer opportunities. The results of this survey have been instrumental in both refining our strategic plan and guiding the board through the executive director search process. We were thrilled to see such high levels of engagement and interest from our members and community partners.



Lightfoot Bay Coastal Wetlands, Photo by Sam Prentice

Building on this feedback, the board and staff participated in retreats to revise our strategic plan. This revision reflects our commitment to strengthening our three pillars: conservation, stewardship, and nature connections. Key components include intensified outreach and communication efforts, staff expansion by 60% over the next five years, and a commitment to fair wages and benefits with payroll projected to grow by 100%. To help KLT achieve these strategic goals and fulfill our mission, the board revived the Fundraising Committee and created and implemented a 2024 fundraising plan.

Finally, using feedback from the member survey and strategic plan, the KLT board conducted a robust national search for a new ED. The Search Committee—made up of two past Board presidents, three members of the Executive Committee, and an at-large member with extensive land trust consulting experience —was delighted by the number of highly qualified candidates, especially those with land trust experience. After remote and in-person interviews, the KLT Board was unanimous and enthusiastic in its decision to offer B Lauer the position. She will begin in January 2025.



Lily Creek Nature Area

A big thank you to Interim ED and Project Specialist Pat Toczydlowski, who has been juggling two roles with incredible dedication. We also deeply appreciate the hard work of our amazing staff members Jill Fisher, B Lauer, and Carolyn Meingast, our volunteers, members, and community partners. All of you play a vital role in protecting the Keweenaw for perpetuity!

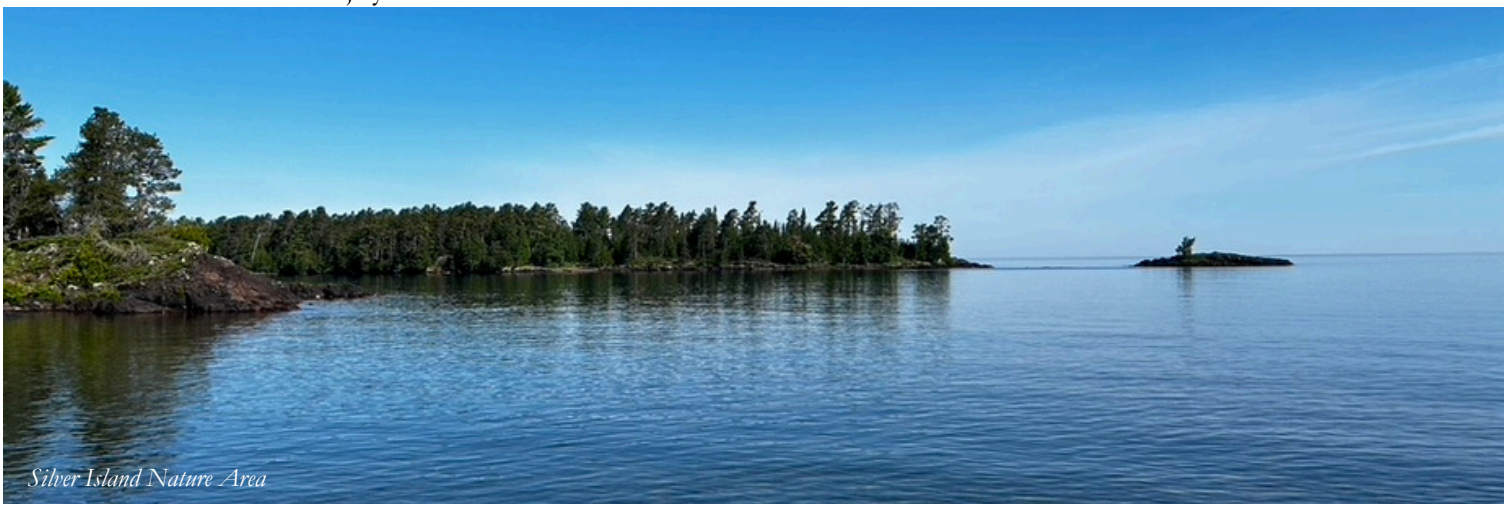
Land Conservation

By Pat Toczydlowski, Interim Executive Director and Project Specialist

Protection of undeveloped Lake Superior shoreline and access to its waters remain among the highest priorities for KLT's land conservation program, based in part on community input and regional conservation plans. The donation of Silver Island, completed in 2023, is a project not remarkable in its 8 acres, but in the conservation of an entire Great Lakes island with over half a mile of shoreline. The recently completed conservation of 52 acres along Jacob's Creek on the north shore of the Keweenaw Peninsula protects another quarter mile of shoreline along with spectacular oak wooded dunes and the diverse habitats along Jacob's Creek and forested wetlands and rocky bluff heading inland on this land parcel. Altogether, KLT properties protect about 10 miles of Lake Superior shoreline, the impact of which is magnified by connecting lands managed by government or other conservation entities for public use and benefit.

While KLT raised nearly a million dollars to purchase the Jacob's Creek property, at appraised value, land donations have been a hallmark of KLT's land conservation successes over the past several years. Over the past 6 years, KLT has established 8 new nature areas, 6 by donation and one through a bargain sale at half its market value. In addition, 5 nature areas owned by KLT have been expanded, one by land donation. While KLT assumes some of the upfront costs to accept these lands, this is a highly cost-effective approach to conservation, and impactful given the quality and features of these protected lands.

KLT holds 20 conservation easements (CEs) and has not added any since 2017. While easement work will continue, KLT has made an intentional shift towards protecting land by ownership. This approach provides more direct public benefits and community connection to the land, while offering KLT more control. KLT must balance land protection with the ongoing stewardship needs that follow. This may become more difficult, and urgent, as land prices and market competition rise and the time to act shortens. KLT staff are fielding more inquiries regarding land, perhaps due in part to the demographics of landowners in our community along with increasing development pressures within our service area. Some of these have or are likely to result in planned legacy gifts to be realized in time, but several conservation projects are nearing completion that will establish new nature areas to be enjoyed soon.



Silver Island Nature Area

LAND CONSERVATION IMPACT AT A GLANCE

27 nature areas owned and open to the public

3,864 acres owned by KLT

10 miles of Lake Superior shoreline protected

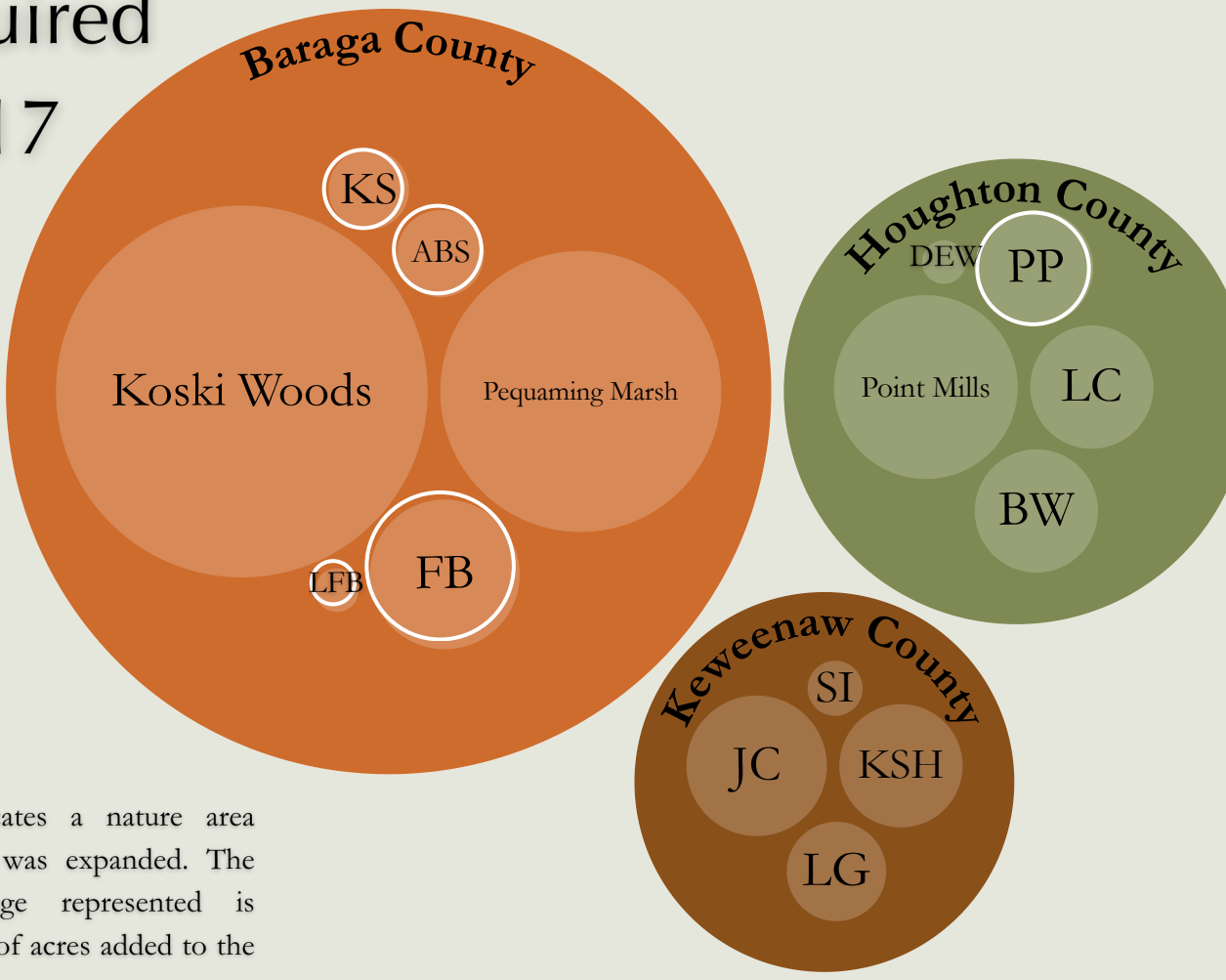
0.5% of the total land area of Baraga, Houghton, and Keweenaw Counties owned by KLT

0.25% of property tax base in value of land owned by KLT in Keweenaw, Houghton, and Baraga Counties

20 conservation easements

4,220 acres protected under conservation easement

Land acquired since 2017



KS- Koski Shores
ABS- Abbaye North Shore
FB- Finlander Bay
LFB- Lightfoot Bay
DEW- Din Egen Woods
PP- Princess Point
BW- Boston Woods
SI- Silver Island
JC- Jacob's Creek
KSH- Keweenaw Sandhills
LG-Lake Glazon

Indicates a nature area that was expanded. The acreage represented is that of acres added to the nature area.

Fig. 1 The size of internal circles corresponds to the number of acres acquired. The more acres, the larger the circle.

Stewardship

By Jill Fisher, Botanist and Stewardship Manager

KLT applied for and was awarded an AmeriCorps NCCC team from July 12th to Sept 5th. The application process and preparation for the team to arrive took much time and effort from KLT staff and consumed much of the stewardship bandwidth for the summer. The work accomplished by the team was beneficial in that many of the projects were time consuming, did not lend themselves well for a regular KLT volunteer work day, and had been on our "to do" list for years. This included some demolition projects, reroofing and reinforcing the summer kitchen at Marsin, and rebuilding a much-needed woodshed and boardwalk at Lightfoot Bay. Other projects the team accomplished will benefit us in years to come; for example the team built Leopold style benches and were able to deploy some of them. These benches not only allow for a deeper and more relaxed nature connection for visitors who wish to linger, they allow for greater accessibility as more people can get out and enjoy nature when they know they have a place to rest for a bit. This can be handy for all, from our youngest to oldest users!



Keeping a team of 5 busy for 40 hours a week with the right tools, materials, and work plan turned out to be more than a full-time job for staff. In addition to the bigger projects, the AmeriCorps team helped with some of the regular maintenance of managing invasive species and clearing trails. It was a pleasure to have these young volunteers working with us and a pleasure for us to share the beauty of the Keweenaw with them, including many firsts for them like taking a sauna, jumping into a Great Lake, and blueberry picking.

Due to the high input of hosting this team, some of our regular stewardship was put on hold. You may have experienced a trail in need of TLC. Coming in 2025 we will be soliciting help from our membership by asking for Site Stewards to help us maintain our growing number of nature areas. These volunteers can choose to support one KLT nature area that they are especially attached to or they can join a Roaming Stewards group, willing to travel around as needed and to support multiple sites. KLT staff will work with, train, and fully support Site Stewards so that, together, we can better maintain our trails and habitats and offer an improved outdoor experiences for our members and community. Connecting to nature has always been deeply important for our mental and physical health. As our area becomes more populated, KLT's ability to provide places to connect to nature becomes more important.


Silver Island Nature Area

2023-2024 STEWARDSHIP AT A GLACE

78
Volunteers engaged in stewardship work

3.9
Miles of trail created (at Keweenaw Sandhills Nature Area and Sally M. Ollila Memorial Woodland)

>200
sedges and rushes planted

250
native trees added to native plant nursery

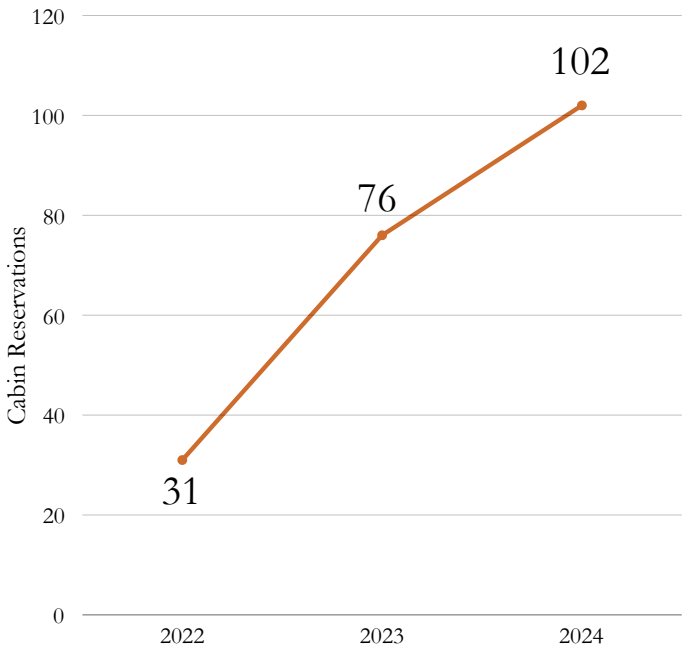
400
conifers planted at Huron Bay Field Station by Sustainable Resources Institute, Inc.

10
new benches built

1,040
hours served by AmeriCorps NCCC Team


Din Egan Woods, Photo by Jim and Anne Kalen

Cabin Program



KLT was at the forefront of the land trust community in terms of seeing buildings that came with the land as an asset and opportunity. The Marsin Nature Retreat and rustic cabins that may be scheduled for use by donation offer a more immersive experience on our protected lands, and help us reach new audiences that can appreciate and support our work.

This past year brought a steep increase in cabin users. This is partially due to increased interest in the Keweenaw as a destination and partially thanks to a new online reservation tool, written by our tech and IT volunteer, Izaak, that makes scheduling easier and more efficient for staff and users. Funds from cabins reservations directly benefit our stewardship program. Due to the increased use, these funds are necessary for providing upkeep and maintenance for the structures.

Nature Connections

By B Lauer, Communications and Program Specialists

Four seasons in the Keweenaw provides the perfect venue for connecting the community of the Keweenaw and visitors alike with the outdoors. While the core of KLT's mission is protecting land, we recognize that people are an intrinsic part of our ecosystems and the power of connecting people to nature. Not only does connecting with nature have the capacity to improve individuals' quality of life, but it also has the potential to increase sense of place, build empathy for the non-human and more than human components of the Keweenaw, and foster the next generation of conservationists and stewards.

KLT is committed to creating many and diverse opportunities for people to connect with nature. Primary amongst these is helping people get outside. This year, KLT was fortunate to organize (in partnership with many outstanding volunteers) many outings ranging from a mindfulness hike for MTU students, to a moonlit snowshoe adventure at Point Mills, and autumn Tyke Hikes. We do our best to ensure that all groups feel represented and can find space to join us in getting outside.


Hungarian Falls Nature Area


Steve Farm Nature Area


Boston Pond Nature Area

In addition to outdoor adventures, KLT offered a robust year of communications. Through print materials like mailed newsletters and digital communications channels like email and social media, KLT is not only able to share the latest news, but give people more options to experience the beauty of the Keweenaw. Another way that KLT worked to diversify the ways in which people can experience the Keweenaw is through the launch of a pilot Artist-in-Residence Program on Silver Island. Thanks to a grant from the Land Trust Alliance, KLT welcomed three artists to spend time living on the island to be inspired to create. Silver Island was home to a poet, an interdisciplinary artist who created paintings, and a photographer. This pilot program will inform KLT and hopefully lead to more opportunities for artists to engage with KLT and our protected lands in the future.

2023-2024 NATURE CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT A GLACE

35 events hosted

600 attendees at KLT events

Countless self-initiated outdoor adventures on KLT protected lands



Steve Farm Nature Area



Lily Creek Nature Area, Photo by Sarah Kuhl

350 social media posts

36 emails sent

1,232 newsletters mailed

3 artists in residence

40 community organizations collaborated with

434 current members

190 new members



A community partner protecting land, water, and quality of life through land conservation, stewardship, and nature connections.

Lake Superior, photo by Chris Woodry