Annual Impact Report

October 2024-2025



ACCREDITED LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

Keweenaw LAND TRUST

Executive Director Report

By B Lauer, Executive Director

My first year as the Executive Director of the Keweenaw Land Trust has been one of both discovery and deepening conviction. Every day, I've seen how conservation here is more than protecting land—it's about belonging to a place and caring for one another through it.



KLT staff celebrate Carolyn's retirement with a luau themed party

The projects highlighted throughout this report, from protecting the sweeping forests around Little Spruce Lake to building trails at Boston Creek, each tell a story of shared commitment. These aren't just transactions or acres on a map. They represent trust built over years, volunteers showing up with shovels and laughter, and neighbors imagining what their community can be when land is cared for together.

This year also reminded me that resilience begins with people. Behind every successful conservation project are staff members balancing complex challenges, partners offering expertise, and members who give what they can because they believe in what this work means. That collective effort is how KLT continues to grow, not only in what we protect, but in how we show up for the Keweenaw.

As we reflect on what connection truly means, I want to recognize someone who modeled it every day. After five years with KLT, Carolyn Meingast retired this year, leaving behind more than well-organized files and sticky notes with uplifting messages—she left a living example of warmth and care. Carolyn had a gift for remembering small details about people that made them feel seen, for writing thank-you notes that carried real gratitude, and for welcoming everyone who walked through our doors. Her life-long career as an educator didn't halt when she started at KLT. Though she's no longer in the office each day, the lessons she taught us continue to guide us. We've learned from her that connection isn't a task. It's a way of being. Carrying that forward is one of the most important forms of stewardship we can practice.

Looking ahead, our focus is on connection. We're investing in ways for more people to take part: volunteering, learning, visiting, and finding their own sense of belonging within the lands we protect. We're strengthening systems that help our organization endure and reflecting on what conservation for the next generation must look like: inclusive, accessible, and community-powered.

It's an honor to lead KLT into this next chapter—to listen, learn, and build on the legacies entrusted to us. Together, we're ensuring that the Keweenaw remains not just a beautiful landscape, but a living home for all who care for it.

Board Report

By Nancy Langston, President of the Board of Directors



Little Spruce Lake Nature Reserve



Boston Creek Nature Area. Photo: Keith Meyers

The Keweenaw Land Trust Board of Directors is pleased to report on a year filled with significant conservation achievements, strategic planning initiatives, and community engagement. As we reflect on 2025, we celebrate the progress made in fulfilling our mission to protect land, water, and quality of life through conservation, stewardship, and nature connections.

This year brought permanent protection of some of the Keweenaw's most treasured landscapes. The acquisition of Jacob's Falls stands as a particular highlight. This beloved waterfall near the famous Jam Pot will now remain in public hands forever. Equally significant is the protection of Little Spruce Lake in Baraga County, representing one of our largest single acquisitions at approximately 1,320 acres. This property includes two complete lakes within its boundaries, providing critical habitat for wildlife and fisheries. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the dedicated individuals who participated in making these conservation victories possible.

The spirit of hands-on conservation came alive through countless volunteer hours devoted to developing the Boston Creek Nature Area. Board directors and community members constructed trails, boardwalks, and bridges throughout this property, made possible through the generous vision of Sue Stephens. Located near Hancock, this public nature area will serve generations of Copper Country residents and visitors, furthering our mission of fostering nature connections.

Recognizing the urgent challenges posed by climate change, the board dedicated substantial time in 2025 to carbon resilience. Carbon-sensitive forest protection will help our forests and Lake Superior shoreline ecosystems remain resilient as they face rising temperatures and shifting precipitation patterns. This strategic focus on resilience extends to organizational sustainability. Understanding that people are core to effective conservation, we continue to prioritize securing funding to provide our staff with equitable salaries and the resources necessary for long-term success. Our commitment to building a resilient organization reflects our belief that investing in people is essential for protecting the Keweenaw's natural heritage.

The board extends warm thanks to our exceptional team, led by new Executive Director B Lauer, whose leadership has energized our organization. We celebrate our dedicated staff, including Pat Toczydlowski, Jill Fisher, John Frye, Carolyn Meingast, Elam Maurer, and Tiff DeGroot. We were delighted to welcome new staff members Elam and Tiff, and sad to see Carolyn retire and John step down. As we look toward the future, we remain deeply grateful for the partnership of our members, community collaborators, and conservation champions. Together, we are building a legacy of protection that will preserve the Keweenaw's extraordinary landscapes for perpetuity.

Land Conservation

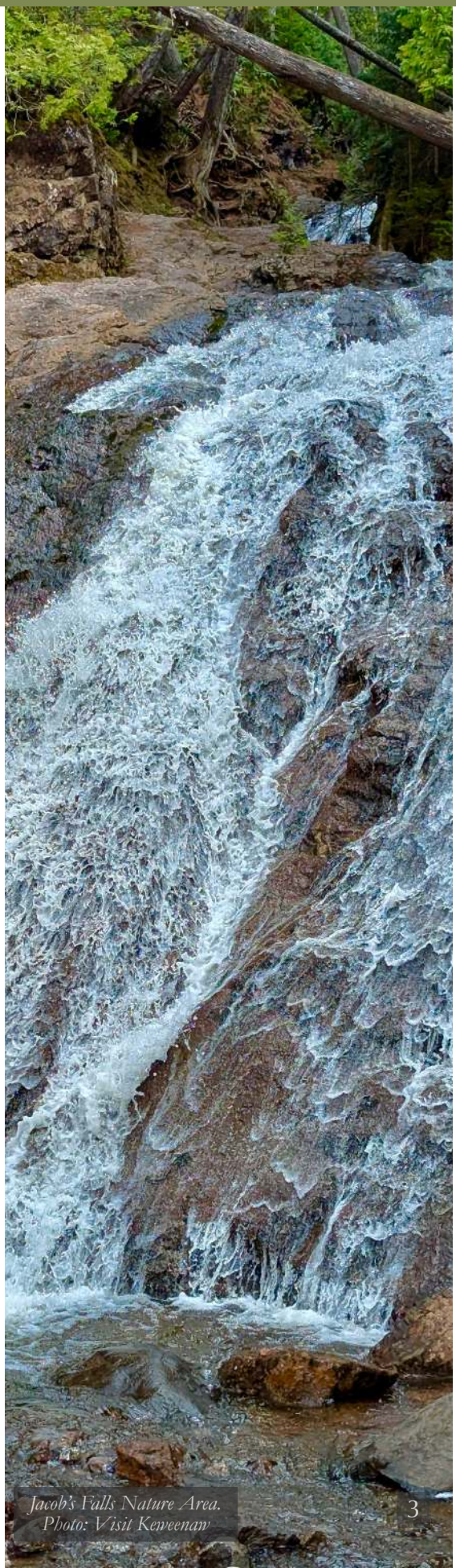
By Pat Toczydlowski, Project Specialist

Since last October, KLT completed land protection projects to create three new nature areas and expand two as we continue to field a stream of inquiries for potential projects. Last December, Suzanne Stephens donated 40 acres on a beautiful stretch of Boston Creek. Sue donated an adjoining 35 acres that will remain private during her lifetime under a Reserved Life Estate deed.

A high visibility project came together quickly to conserve Jacob's Falls, a popular tourist stop along Highway M-26. A real estate listing posted late in 2024 for a land parcel containing these falls prompted community concern and action by KLT. Fortunately, a few key donors made a timely purchase by KLT possible that will protect public access forever and prevent future development near this iconic feature.

In May, KLT completed a project several years in the making and of high ecological impact: the Little Spruce Lake Nature Reserve. What started as a potential conservation easement project became a generous donation of 1,320 acres of forested land on the upper reaches of the Sturgeon River encompassing two entire lakes and a segment of the North Country Trail. This remote property lies in proximity to tens of thousands of acres managed as wilderness within the Michigamme Highlands, a minimally fragmented landscape of high conservation value. The donors, Bill Lynch and Barbara Manger, also contributed financially to establish a supporting investment fund for this project that will help KLT carry out goals for the Reserve. Several partners contributed to project development and will continue to play a role in the stewardship of this tremendous property.

Expanding conservation areas can enhance their conservation impact and public benefits and it can also make sense economically. John Ollila donated a 10-acre parcel to the Houghton Keweenaw Conservation District early in the Pilgrim River Watershed Project and later donated an adjoining 22 acres to KLT as the Sally M Ollila Memorial Woodland. With John's permission, the parcels were combined under KLT to consolidate ongoing landowner and stewardship obligations. On the Abbaye Peninsula, land donor Rick McGill recently purchased an adjoining parcel and donated it to KLT to protect an additional 300' of undeveloped Lake Superior shoreline. He also extinguished his Reserved Life Estate on 36 of the adjoining acres, opening this land—now under KLT stewardship—for public use. Since inception, KLT has completed 18 projects to expand 12 of its 29 nature areas, more importantly expanding their conservation and public benefit impacts.



Jacob's Falls Nature Area. Photo: Visit Keweenaw

LAND CONSERVATION IMPACT AT A GLANCE

29
nature areas owned and open to the public

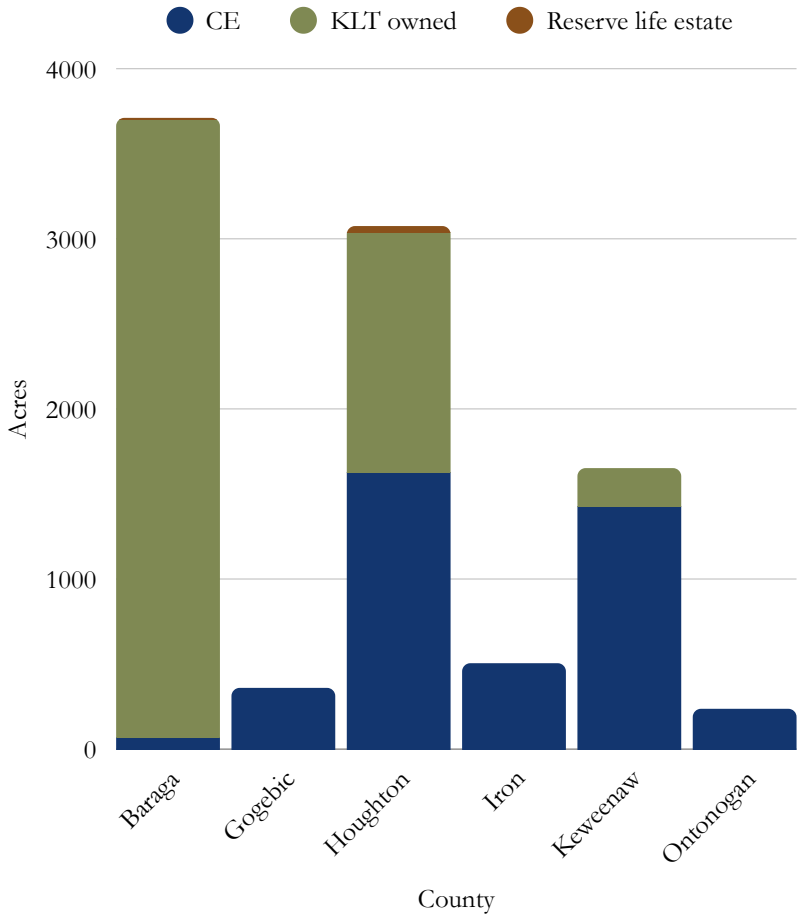
5,278
acres owned by KLT

4,220
acres protected under conservation easement

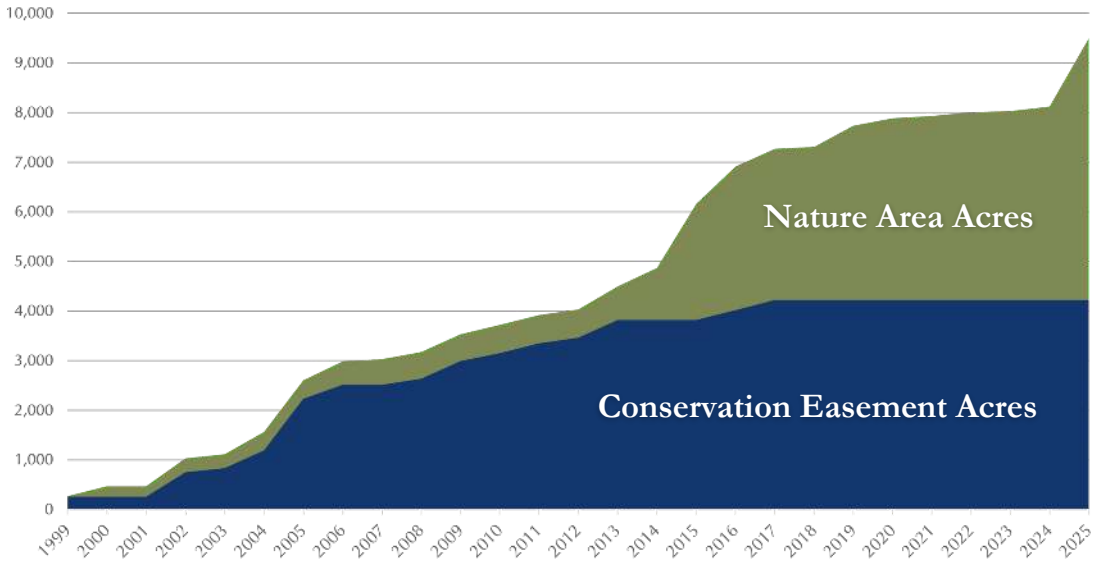
10
miles of Lake Superior shoreline protected

$1 → $5
each donated dollar amplified fivefold through strategic grant funding

10x
return on investment in staff



KLT Protected Land Over Time



1/2
of the value of all KLT owned land has been donated

Stewardship

By Jill Fisher, Botanist and Stewardship Manager

Last field season, stewardship efforts focused on addressing deferred maintenance across several KLT buildings, supported by the AmeriCorps Community Conservation Corps. This focus required postponing some trail, signage, and habitat maintenance projects—work that has become the centerpiece of our 2025 stewardship season, fueled by two grants, a significant memorial gift, and two dedicated interns. With one of our largest stewardship budget to date and one of our most ambitious project lists, 2025 marks a year of major progress.

For many years, Jim Belote served as an active site steward at Paavola Wetlands, building and maintaining trails and leading public hikes. Following Jim's passing, generous memorial gifts allowed KLT to purchase new tools and restore the trails Jim helped create. These contributions also provided matching funds for a grant from the Copper Shores Community Health Foundation Community Wellness and Outdoor Recreation Fund, held at the Keweenaw Community Foundation, enabling rehabilitation of accessible trails at both Paavola Wetlands and Boston Pond. Together, these funds helped KLT refresh aging equipment and invest in new field tools.



Elam and a volunteer manage invasive species at Paavola Wetlands.

To strengthen KLT's long-term stewardship capacity, staff implemented use of Landscape, a land management software made for conservation organizations. Landscape will help us streamline data collection, project management, and long-term planning, helping ensure that stewardship work keeps pace with the complexity of managing 29 nature areas and 20 conservation easements.

Building on these investments, our 2025 summer interns, Elam Maurer (an MTU graduate) and Henry Louniboss (a senior at Houghton High), contributed hundreds of hours across multiple KLT nature areas, advancing trail and habitat work throughout the region. Their efforts strengthened KLT's on-the-ground capacity and helped staff coordinate stewardship projects more efficiently. Following his internship, Elam has continued working with KLT as part of the stewardship team.

KLT also benefited from the combined efforts of Mark Roberts, the bridge and boardwalk building crew he led, and many volunteer work groups. Their collective work drove substantial progress this year and was bolstered by a Visit Keweenaw Destination Development Grant, which supported improvements in signage and trail experience across many of our nature areas.

Through collaboration, KLT has made impressive progress this season. As these projects show, KLT trails do not simply appear. They require extensive planning, clearing, widening, rerouting, and blazing. Climate change is also reshaping our stewardship needs bringing wetter summers, more invasive species, and changing forest dynamics. These challenges demand greater capacity and resources to sustain the ecological integrity of KLT's nature areas.



Volunteers build a boardwalk at Boston Creek Nature Area. Photo: Keith Meyers

STEWARDSHIP IMPACT AT A GLANCE







From top left: Volunteers manage invasives at Paavola Wetlands; Elam and Henry install signs at Boston Woods; Elam paint blazes a trail; Tiff installs a new sign; MTU volunteers clear trails at Paavola; MTU's Wildland Fire club benches a trail at Boston Creek







22

miles of publicly accessible trail on KLT lands

198

new signs procured

249

hours of invasive species management

25

volunteer work days

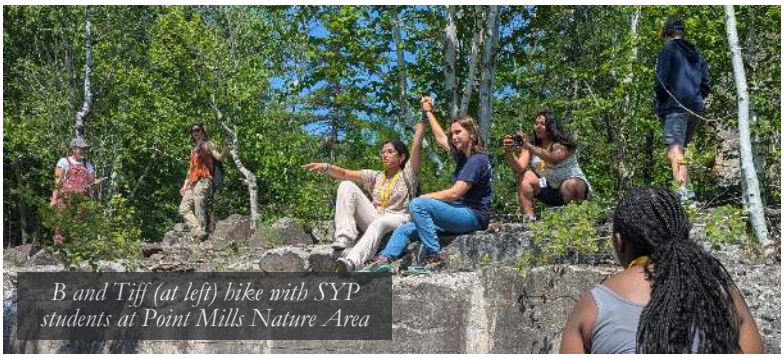
>661

volunteer hours gifted to stewardship work

Nature Connections

From December 2024 through July 2025, KLT had no dedicated staff for outreach and volunteer coordination. During this time, Outreach Committee members supported KLT by participating in monthly "working meetings" focused on completing specific outreach and communication tasks. In early 2025, the KLT Board of Directors approved the annual budget, which included funding for an Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator position. By the close of the application period, KLT had received 17 high-quality applications, making the selection process highly competitive. In early July 2025, Tiff DeGroot accepted the position of Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator.

–Mariana Grohowski, KLT Board of Directors, KLT Outreach Committee Chair, Member of Hiring Committee



B and Tiff (at left) hike with SYP students at Point Mills Nature Area



Foraging walk before Farm Field Forest dinner. Photo: Goose Collective

I joined KLT as Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator in the peak of this year's hot and busy summer field season. On my first day, I joined B for a guided hike at Point Mills Nature Area with MTU Summer Youth Program (SYP) students. Together, we clambered over remnants of the historic mine and identified plants in little "pockets of life"—areas where Jill, KLT's Botanist and Stewardship Manager, had laid rich soil over barren stamp sands to promote the growth of newly planted native species. As I walked the paths and shared the joy of being in nature with these middle school students, I knew that KLT was the right fit for me, and my passion for connecting people to our natural world.

These past few months have been a whirlwind of onboarding: learning KLT's rich history, its processes, and visiting some KLT nature areas that I was not already familiar with. I am excited to harness my previous experience working for a global nonprofit to help streamline KLT's internal systems and processes, helping us more efficiently communicate, connect with supporters and volunteers, and gain and utilize feedback.

I am grateful that KLT and partners had events in the works that I could take the lead on—including Farm Field Forest, KLT's first foray into outdoor fine dining and inaugural event in partnership with From the Ground Farmers Market Collective. We brought together nearly three dozen food and nature lovers to enjoy a fantastic, locally sourced meal in a very ambitious location (the middle of the historic Paavola farmstead field)—while raising roughly $2,400 for both organizations.

What felt like mere moments after that first SYP hike, I accepted the position of Community Engagement Manager, enabling me to expand my commitments to KLT through developing strategies for outreach and volunteer engagement, membership, and more. In the coming year, with expanded capacity, I am excited to get outside with more volunteers, community members, and partner organizations. I aim to help people of all ages and backgrounds connect with the trees, plants, soil, stones, water, wildlife—and every part of our unique Keweenaw landscape.

–Tiff DeGroot, Ph.D., Community Engagement Manager

NATURE CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT A GLACE

Beyond measure

Feet on trails, and hearts outside



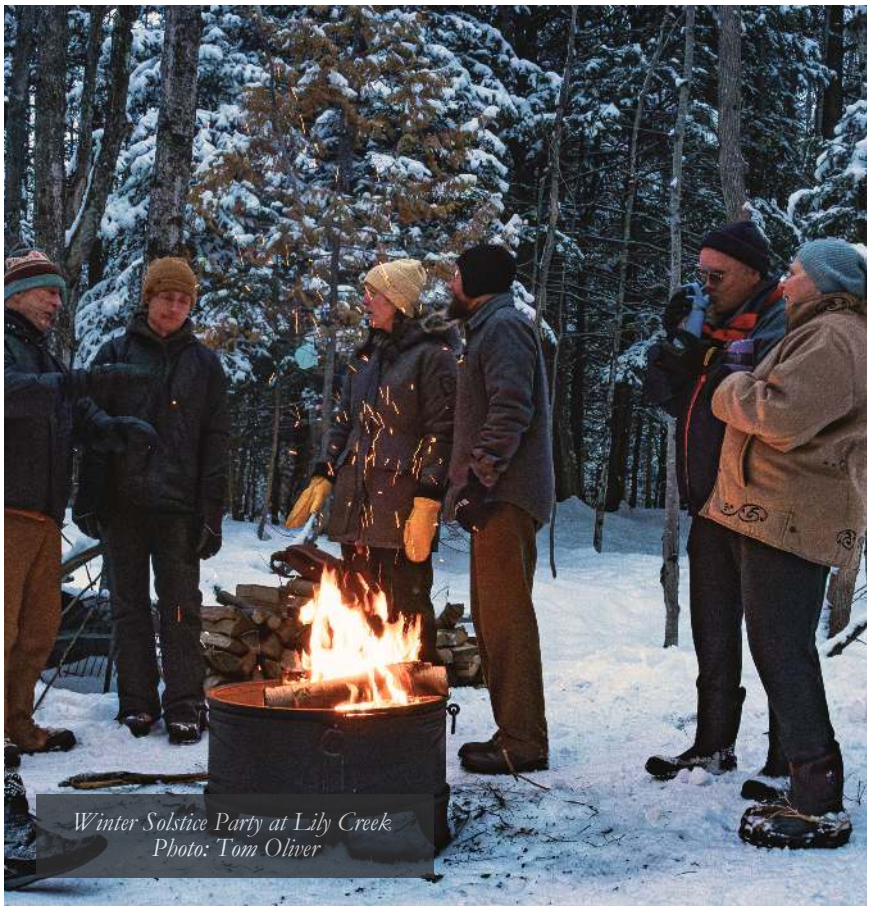
Kim Green enjoys a new bench with a view at Boston Creek Nature Area

24
events hosted

530
attendees at KLT-hosted events



Biologist Abe Stone teaching foraging principles at Farm Field Forest. Photo: Goose Collective



Winter Solstice Party at Lily Creek Photo: Tom Oliver

51
community organizations and individuals partnered with

1,946
handwritten thank you notes sent

1,173
newsletters mailed

3,542
social media interactions

MEMBERSHIP AND FUNDRAISING AT A GLACE

$2,400,500
monetary value of land donated for conservation this year

$371,000
in grant funding from foundations and partners, including

$144,000
in unrestricted support from members

$11,000
donated to the Land Stewardship Fund by cabin users

$195,000
in flexible operating support

$84,000
in realized bequests from two individuals

404
current member huoseholds

85
new member households

74%
of members chose to renew support this year



Linda Ott, Linda Belote, and Stan Vitton enjoy dinner at Farm Field Forest. Photo: Goose Collective

Thank you!

Everything within these pages—the lands conserved, the bridges built, the moments of wonder sparked—is a reflection of your care. Every success we've shared this year began with your choice to give, to volunteer, to show up, and to believe that the special places of the Keweenaw matter.

At KLT, we don't see this work as ours alone. It belongs to all who have tended trails in the rain, written a check, brought a child to explore a wetland, remembered KLT in their estate plans, or simply trusted us to do this work on your behalf. Together, you have made lasting space for nature and community to thrive side by side.

Our shared vision connects generations. It links those who first set out to protect these places with those who will someday inherit them. Each act of generosity, whether measured in time, treasure, or trust, adds to a legacy of care that will outlast us all.

Your support, of every size and every kind, has strengthened the foundation that allows KLT to keep growing into the future. You are the reason these places endure, open and alive, for everyone who comes next.

Thank you for being part of this story, for believing in what we can accomplish together, and for keeping the Keweenaw a place where care for the land and care for community are one and the same.

With the deepest gratitude,



B. Lauer
Executive Director

Paavola Wetlands. Photo: Goose Collective



Sound Finances
Ethical Conduct
Responsible Governance
Lasting Stewardship

Keweenaw LAND TRUST

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

Paavola Wetlands. Photo: Goose Collective