

The Cygnet



2529 Lake Ave. North Muskegon, MI 49445

<http://muskegonlakenaturepreserve.com>

JANUARY 2025

Winter at the Preserve: A Different Kind of Beauty

Even in winter, the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve offers unique opportunities to connect with nature. Bundle up and bring your binoculars to spot our winter bird residents – you might see bright red cardinals against the snow, black-capped chickadees flitting between branches, or downy woodpeckers searching for food. Winter's bare trees make bird watching especially rewarding, and our trails remain accessible for this peaceful activity.

For photography enthusiasts, winter transforms the preserve into a stunning natural studio. From delicate ice formations along the shoreline to the interplay of light and shadow on snow-covered branches, every visit offers new possibilities to capture the quiet beauty of the season. Morning and late afternoon light can be particularly magical for photographs. We'd love to see your winter snapshots – share them on our [Facebook page](#) to inspire others to discover the preserve's winter charm!



Winter Wonderland

Looking Back on 2024

- Wilder River Walk fundraising goal achieved!
- Our permits from the Army Corp of Engineers and EGLE for the repair of the Wilder River Walk have been approved and issued.
- New entry sign designed, fabricated and donated by Montague Metal Products.
- Dog waste station donated by Northside Veterinary Hospital.
- Two boot-brush stations to help prevent the spread of invasive species, donated by the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission.
- Split rail fence installed to help prevent erosion around the pond near the entrance bridge.
- Thursday night plants event sponsored by Muskegon Conservation District.



Looking Back on 2024

- Multiple school field trips.
- Ongoing invasive species removal.
- Pier repair on the Al Bell Trail.
- Ongoing board replacement on the Wilder River Walk and the Al Bell Trail.
- Maintenance & Education sheds and the pump house painted.
- Cytiva Manufacturing Employees Volunteer Work Project.
- Summer Scientists from the Boys and Girls Club of Muskegon, explored the Preserve with WMEAC (West Michigan Environmental Action Council) providing materials, programming and instructors.
- Booth display at Taste of Muskegon.
- Booth display at Sportsman for Youth.



Looking Ahead to 2025

- ☐ **Our big goal for the coming year is the re-supporting and leveling of the Wilder River Walk. This will begin in March or sooner depending on the ice cover dispersing.**
- ☐ **Ongoing invasive species removal.**
- ☐ **Planting of new native shrubs, trees and flowers.**
- ☐ **Ongoing board replacement.**
- ☐ **Expand educational programs.**
- ☐ **We will be doing our basic walkway repairs throughout the year and will begin addressing some of the unevenness appearing on the asphalt walkway to maintain handicap accessibility.**
- ☐ **A local contractor has volunteered to grade our parking lot for us this spring, and we are hoping to be able to provide dolomite for areas that need to be filled. Please remember to thank him for his time and equipment donation when he is working. This is the same company that clears the snow if it becomes too deep.**
- ☐ **We have a wish list of other projects to bring before our Board of Directors so watch our newsletters for future announcements.**

Wilder River Walk Update

The contractor who will be making the repairs to the Wilder River Walk said we are coming up on their schedule! The actual date will be relative to ice cover on the lake. If the lake thaws out, they can get started in January/February. Otherwise, they will be looking at March.

The repairs will involve installing metal pilings alongside the existing (short) wooden legs that originally supported the boardwalk. The metal pipes will extend down till they hit solid material, then be connected to the original framework under the walkway. The wooden posts were only about 16' long because they were sitting on solid ground and only extended into the ground enough to keep them straight, like fence posts.





Building a Legacy: MERES Endowment Fund

Did you know that the The Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve is owned by the Muskegon Environmental Research and Education Society (MERES), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization formed in 1997? It was formed in order to operate the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve as one dedicated to environmental research and education.

However, while the Nature Preserve serves a public purpose, it is not public property. It is not owned by the city, county, state or federal governments and receives no tax dollars. The Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve relies entirely on donations and the hard work of our dedicated volunteers to manage the Preserve and achieve its research and educational goals. There is no paid staff. The members of its Board of Directors are all volunteers.

We are very pleased to announce that the Muskegon Environmental Research and Education Society (MERES) has established an endowment fund with the Community Foundation for Muskegon County. This exciting development helps secure the future of our beloved Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve.

Our 17-acre natural sanctuary in North Muskegon is a vital community resource for education, recreation, and environmental stewardship. Through this endowment fund, we can ensure long-term support for our educational programs, benefiting local schools and community members for generations to come.

While your direct support remains essential for our daily operations—including maintenance and invasive species control—the endowment fund offers a new way to make a lasting impact. Everyone can contribute to MERES' future, regardless of gift size. Whether you choose to give today or include MERES in your estate planning, you'll help preserve this natural treasure for future generations. Creating a legacy doesn't require vast wealth—just a generous spirit and desire to make a difference in your community.

All contributions to our endowment fund are tax-deductible and can be structured in various ways. To learn more about supporting the MERES endowment fund, please contact Heidi Systema at the Community Foundation: Phone: 231.332.4107

Email: heidi@muskegonfoundation.org

Educators Corner

Students at Reeths-Puffer Central Elementary are participating in the One Seed Project this spring. They are learning about winter sowing and planting 425 native blue indigo and milkweed plants, which will then be planted at the preserve this spring by the students.

The school is hoping to offset costs for the Preserve to buy new plants and be sure that all of the students know the benefits of planting natives for the local ecosystem. If the project goes well, they hope to expand the project to all Reeths-Puffer Schools next year.



The Ron Brown Education Pavilion serves as an outdoor classroom for teachers and students from our local school districts, in their study of wetlands and forest environmental issues. The pavilion is also available to groups, families and civic organizations.

The pavilion can be reserved at no cost by contacting the Preserve via our website at <https://muskegonlakenaturepreserve.com> and using the **Contact Us form or by going to our Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/MuskegonLakeNaturePreserve> and messaging us.**

Please include your name, school, number of students, grade level and what day and time you would like to reserve the pavilion. Once we confirm the date is available, we will add your reservation to our website and FB events Pages.



Ron Brown Education Pavilion

Volunteer Opportunities

Our Education Committee is recruiting volunteers! The committee's goals for 2025 include promoting "self-led" educational opportunities for both students, individuals and families, developing "Docent" led walks or educational talks in collaboration with GVSU and MCC and reaching out to individual educators to inform them of the availability of the Preserve.

Other goals include enlisting and accommodating our Native American neighbors to work with us and to also work with MSU Extension to develop educational events, both for Master Gardeners and led by Master Gardeners. Have a trained group of volunteers ready to assist at educational outings. Increase the number of schools that come to the Preserve as a part of their study of wetlands and forest environmental issues. Develop relationships & partnerships with organizations that work with disadvantaged and special needs kids.

If you are interested in being a part of our Education Committee, please email Steve Thompson at sgthompson55@gmail.com or Tom Willi at twdw53@gmail.com.

President's Message

It is hard to believe it is 2025 and we are beginning to lay our plans for this upcoming year. Last year was truly amazing at the Preserve, as we finally got our first look at the fruits of the habitat renewal that occurred mainly at a time when the preserve was flooded by record high waters and finished at a time when our state was under a covid lockdown. I truly had no idea how spectacular summer would be with all our species maturing and re-seeding.

I would love to thank everyone who helped us get here, but where would I start? With the men who walked onto that island in 1998 and saw not just hundreds of piles of industrial refuse left by countless dump trucks, but an island teeming with life where our young and our families could come to experience the best of nature? Or the countless volunteers over the years that not only toiled physically but who also created learning opportunities or found the financial assets to help us continue to be available. Sadly, many of these are no longer with us, but their love of the preserve continues to touch so many lives on a daily basis.

2025 starts with a new chance to touch lives, to educate and hopefully to inspire our next generation to fight for and protect our natural resources and to learn to live alongside and be a part of our natural world. 2025 comes with my vow to do our best to work with our local educators and to expand the opportunities for the use of our resources for all our residents, whether they are the species that live within the preserve, or our two-legged visitors.

Remember to say thank you when you see our people working there and know, we are all volunteers who are there because we love the preserve and truly believe that it is important to provide our community with a place to come and commune with nature as we are meant to.

Thank you,

Steve Thompson

Member of the Maintenance Committee & Board President

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