

The Cygnet

Spring 2026

Welcome spring!

Here's what's happening at the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve this spring.

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President's Message

Dear Friends of the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve,

After seeing the final result of all the habitat restoration in full bloom last year at the preserve, it is hard to contain my excitement, looking forward to this summer. The blooms were amazing, the trees are growing, and species are starting to return in numbers. We have multiple sessions scheduled for the new Microforest, have received funding for the installation of a pollinator garden near Lake Ave, and are increasing the education opportunities for students and families.

With warmest regards,

Steven Thompson

President, MERES Board of Directors

GROWING A FOREST, ONE SMALL PLOT AT A TIME

The Preserve's Microforest Project Takes Root

Last October, twenty-three dedicated volunteers gathered at the Preserve to break ground on an ambitious project: a new microforest that will transform a small patch of land into a thriving woodland ecosystem. Armed with shovels, cardboard, and determination, they launched the first of three phases that will demonstrate how even compact green spaces can make a big environmental impact.

What Is a Microforest?

A microforest is exactly what it sounds like—a small, densely planted woodland designed to grow quickly and support local ecosystems, even in urban or limited spaces. Often based on the Miyawaki method developed in Japan, microforests use native trees, shrubs, and ground plants packed close together to mimic the structure of a natural forest. This isn't just random planting; it's strategic ecology.

Because these forests rely on native species, the plants are already adapted to our local climate and soil conditions. Within just a few years, the forest becomes self-sustaining, requiring little to no maintenance while delivering outsized environmental benefits.

Small Size, Big Impact

Don't let the word "micro" fool you. These compact forests deliver significant environmental benefits. Microforests improve air quality by absorbing carbon dioxide and filtering pollutants, help reduce urban heat islands by providing shade and natural cooling, and enhance soil health by increasing organic matter and improving water retention.

They also create vital habitats for birds, insects, and other wildlife—bringing biodiversity back to areas that might otherwise be dominated by concrete, asphalt, or monoculture lawns. In a world where habitat loss is accelerating, every pocket of native greenery matters.

Beyond ecology, microforests offer social and educational value that ripples through entire communities. When established on school grounds, in parks, or on unused land, they become living classrooms where people of all ages can learn about native plants, soil science, and environmental stewardship. Over time, these peaceful green spaces enhance mental well-being, foster community connections, and demonstrate that small-scale projects can contribute to much larger environmental solutions.

From Bare Ground to Future Forest

The phase one site at the Preserve has been carefully prepared for success. After clearing, volunteers covered the area with over six inches of nutrient-rich compost. Sheet cardboard was then laid on top—not as trash, but as a biodegradable barrier that will suppress weeds while breaking down into the soil. Finally, a thick layer of wood chips was added to the top.



Now the site sits waiting, which is exactly what it needs to do. Over the next three months, that cardboard and those wood chips will decompose, feeding soil fungi and the countless organisms that eat it. This process cultivates the underground network that will support the forest for decades to come. By late April or early May, depending on weather conditions, planting will begin—native trees, shrubs, ground covers, and wildflowers carefully selected to thrive together.

A Community Effort

None of this would be possible without the generous support of our community partners. Special thanks to the Muskegon Rotary Club, H&H Landscape Supply, the City of North Muskegon DPW, the City of Muskegon, United Way of the Lakeshore, Blended Furniture, McFarland and Sons Tree Service, and PADNOS Recycling Center for making this project a reality.

The planting process this spring will be a community-wide event spread over several weeks, with opportunities for schools, families, and individuals to get their hands dirty and help shape the Preserve's future. Whether you're five or ninety-five, there's a role for you in building this forest.

Watch for details on the Preserve website, Facebook page, and local media outlets. We can't wait to plant alongside you.



Spring 2026 MLNP Calendar of Events

Notes: All Monday Maintenance & Habitat Committee Work Sessions and Stewardship Saturday Workdays meet @ Ron Brown Education Pavilion. Activities are weather-dependent, subject to wind, rain, or lightning. Cancellations will be posted on the MLNP Facebook page.

March 2026

Date	Event	Time
Mon 3/30	Maintenance & Habitat Committee	9 am-Noon

April 2026

Date	Event	Time
Mon 4/6	Maintenance & Habitat Committee	9 am-Noon
Mon 4/13	Maintenance & Habitat Committee	9 am-Noon
Sat 4/18	Stewardship Saturday Workday	9 am-Noon
Sun 4/19	Muskegon Lake Annual Spring Cleanup ³	9 am-Noon
Mon 4/20	Maintenance & Habitat Committee	9 am-Noon
Wed 4/22	Earth Day	TBD
Mon 4/27	Maintenance & Habitat Committee	9 am-Noon

May 2026

Date	Event	Time
Mon 5/4	Maintenance & Habitat Committee	9 am-Noon
Mon 5/11	Maintenance & Habitat Committee	9 am-Noon
Thu 5/14	R.P. Elementary Kindergarten Field Trip	9:30 am-2 pm
Fri 5/15	R.P. Elementary Kindergarten Field Trip	9:30 am-2 pm
Sat 5/16	Stewardship Saturday Workday	9 am-Noon
Mon 5/18	Maintenance & Habitat Committee	9 am-Noon
Thu 5/21	Muskegon Lake Nature Fest	5 pm-Sunset
Fri 5/22	Penn Kindergarten Microforest Planting	TBD
Mon 5/25	Maintenance & Habitat Committee	9 am-Noon
Wed 5/27	Central 1st Grade Microforest Planting	9:30 am-1 pm



Spring Updates



Education	Habitat
<i>Education Chair: Rachel Kent</i> The Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve Education Committee members have been busy creating more opportunities for the community to learn at the Preserve this spring. The committee is planning to hold an educational workshop for K-12 teachers to try out activities they can do with their students while at the preserve. This workshop is tentatively scheduled for June 2026, and educators can receive SCECHs, so keep your eyes open for more information to come!!! We are also in the process of creating a year-long schedule of events for the community to participate in, such as Birding and Coffee, "Passport Event for Earth Day", and many more events at the Preserve. To provide information about the Preserve to the broader Muskegon community, we will also be sponsoring activities outside the Preserve, including Sportsmen for Youth Day 2026 and the Rocket City Water Fest.	<i>Habitat Chair: Andi Kantola</i> Over the winter, the Habitat Committee has been busy preparing for 2026! We submitted visual and trapping turtle survey reports from the first year of turtle survey efforts. Fifteen participants helped document 70 turtles representing four different species. These data help us better understand turtle populations and make informed decisions about how to best support and protect them at the preserve. Thank you to everyone who helped gather this data! Looking ahead, we're excited to continue our Saturdays with a Scientist series, held the first Saturday of each month from June through September, 11 a.m. to noon at the pavilion. We're also preparing to plant the Native Plant Community Garden this spring and will begin starting seeds soon. Volunteers are welcome to join upcoming workdays, which are posted on the calendar (see p. 4). It's a great way to support habitat restoration and learn alongside fellow nature enthusiasts!
Microforest	Fundraising
<i>Microforest Chair: Keely Dunham</i> Spring is around the corner, and we have been busy behind the scenes preparing for the microforest's installation in May (see p. 2-3). As we prepare for planting, we are asking our community to help us name the microforest. You can submit a name recommendation by emailing the Preserve at muskegonlakenaturepreserve@gmail.com, messaging us on the Preserve Facebook page, or by mail at P.O. Box 5038, N. Muskegon, MI 49445. Submissions are due by May 1st and the MERES Board of Directors will vote on the winning name. As we continue with this project, visit our website or Facebook page for announcements, events, and to learn more about how you can support the microforest!	<i>Fundraising Chair: Jodie Galosy</i> The Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve faces an ongoing challenge: while grants support educational programs and special projects, they rarely cover essential operating expenses. Insurance, trail maintenance, invasive species management, and safety infrastructure require approximately \$15,000 annually to keep the preserve safe, accessible, and well-maintained. We're launching a new initiative seeking three Keystone Operating Partners—local businesses willing to invest \$5,000 annually for five years (2026-2030). These strategic partnerships will ensure the preserve's sustainability while our endowment fund builds toward self-sufficiency. Know a potential partner? Contact Jodie Galosy at galosyjo@gmail.com or (517) 648-3034 to suggest prospects or learn more about this exciting opportunity.
Maintenance Committee priorities: We will begin the season by making nest protectors for turtle eggs to aid our turtle populations. We also plan to apply for permits to install a dock to anchor our floating kayak launch and make necessary repairs to the asphalt walkway. Other 2026 plans include side rail repairs along the Wilder walkway and any other needs that arise.	

Favorite Resources

The MLNP website offers excellent [environmental education resources](#) to use at the Preserve, at home, or in the classroom!!

Free ebook!!

From Wasteland to Wonder

Easy ways we can help heal Earth in the sub/urban landscape

by Basil Camu

Abstract: The way we currently manage the suburban and urban landscape is creating a wasteland and harming the well-being of Earth. Fortunately, we have an alternative path: We can work with natural systems instead of working against them. By doing so, we can help heal Earth. We also save time and money because we perform fewer tasks and use fewer products. Best of all, these are simple things that anyone can do regardless of their knowledge or experience.

"In all of my years of reading environmental literature, I have never encountered writing as compelling and comprehensive, yet clear, accessible, and uplifting as Basil Camu's From Wasteland to Wonder. Basil's logic will overwhelm any lingering doubts you may have about this approach to landscaping and provide that kick in the pants so many of us need to take action."

— Doug Tallamy, Ecologist and Author of Nature's Best Hope



More information and the free ebook are available [at this link](#)



Want to learn more about wildflowers native to Michigan?
Check out the [Wildflower Association of Michigan](#)

Volunteering at the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve

Help us Preserve the Preserve! We have multiple volunteer opportunities available.

Volunteer Form

Maintenance Opportunities include board and rail replacement on the boardwalks, repair of picnic tables and benches, trash pickup, trail maintenance and assisting with projects as needed. (see the calendar of events p.4).	Habitat Hand-pull invasive species from May to October. Plant native plants, shrubs and trees as needed. Build and maintain turtle nesting shelters, bird houses, bird feeders and native bee nests. Conduct botanical surveys and collect native seeds seasonally (see the calendar of events p.4).	Education Help facilitate education activities, prepare education supplies and materials, assist with Saturdays with a Scientist, and other education-related programs.
Public Relations Take pictures of the Preserve and at community events involving the Preserve and write articles for the Preserve website, Facebook Page, and Instagram. Staff the MLNP booth and assist with set-up and breakdown at Sportsmen for Youth, Rocket City Water Fest, and Taste of Muskegon. Be an ambassador for us at community events.	Sportsmen for Youth Sportsmen for Youth is a free one-day, family-friendly event in September to introduce youth to the great joy and appreciation of the outdoors and its many opportunities. Volunteers are needed to staff the MLNP booth and assist with set-up and breakdown.	One-Time Volunteer Opportunities: Community Workdays Community Workdays are the perfect short-term opportunity for families, individuals, businesses, and civic organizations to volunteer for a specific community project at the Preserve. The Preserve participates in the Muskegon Lake Annual Spring Cleanup, Earth Day, Muskegon River Trash Bash, European Frog Bit Pull and more.

Other Volunteer Opportunities

Group Volunteer Days: Schedule a volunteer day with your company, organization, or other group

Eagle Scout Projects: Complete your Eagle Scout Project at MLNP

Please contact Tom Willi at muskegonlakenaturepreserve@gmail.com



How to Support the Preserve



The Preserve is free to all, but we depend solely on donations and volunteers to:

- Maintain the Preserve
- Protect its beautiful habitats and wildlife
 - Conduct research
- Offer educational events and activities

You can **donate** to our operating fund or volunteer at our website.

You also can help guarantee our future by donating to the **MERES endowment fund** at the Muskegon Community Foundation.

Contact Information

Website: <http://muskegonlakenaturepreserve.com>

Email: muskegonlakenaturepreserve@gmail.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MuskegonLakeNaturePreserve/>

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 5038, North Muskegon, MI 49445

Physical Address: 2529 Lake Ave., North Muskegon, MI 49445

