

2025-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

OUTLINING THE RENEWED VISION FOR MUD CREEK CONSERVANCY

PREPARED BY:

BENJAMIN MILLER, PRESIDENT

ON BEHALF OF THE 2024/2025 MCC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mud Creek conservancy

VERSION 3.0 2/23/2025

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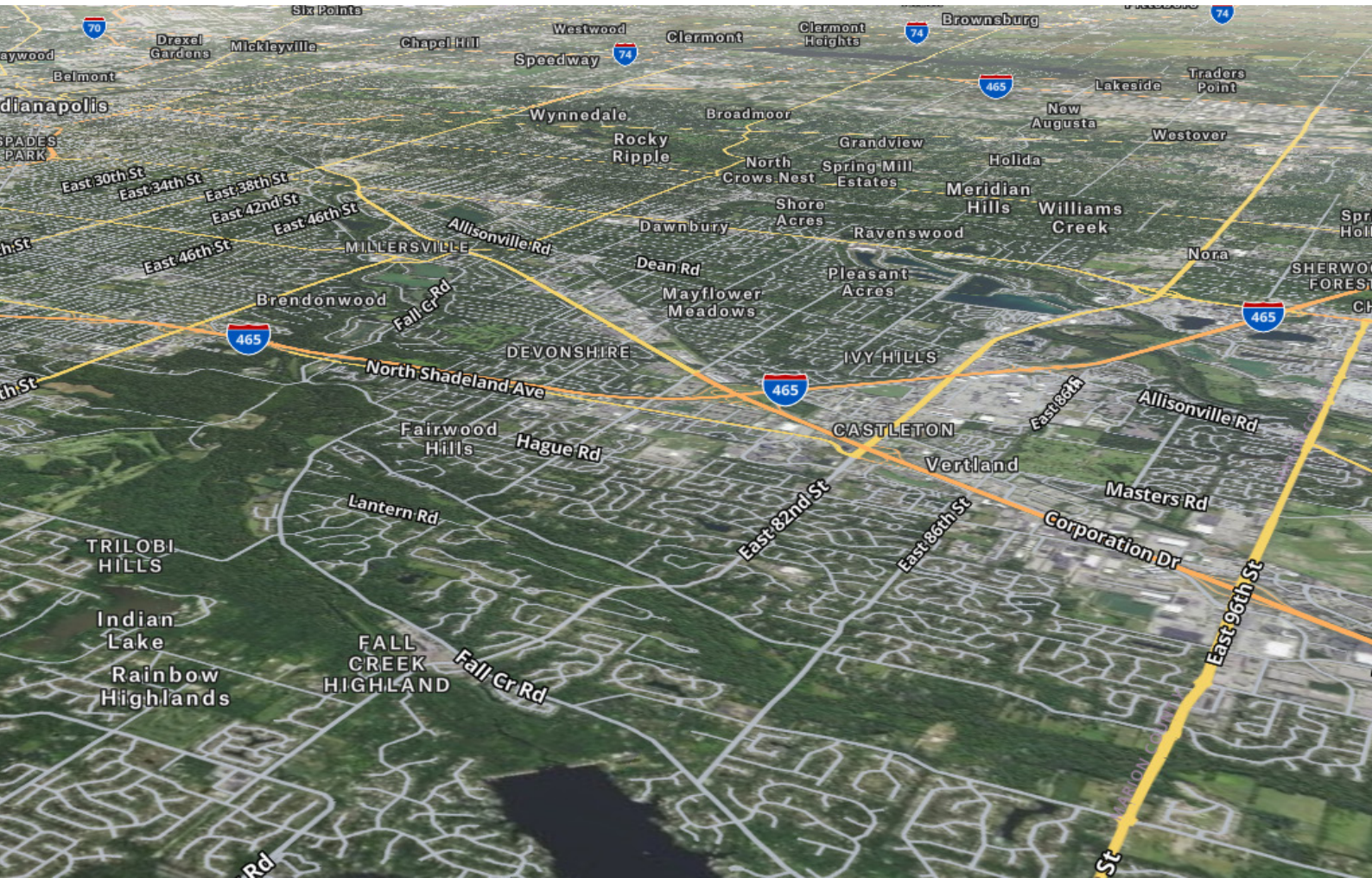
MISSION AND VISION

OUR MISSION is to preserve and restore natural areas in the Mud Creek Valley through land protection initiatives, community outreach and environmental education.

OUR VISION is to ensure the long-term vitality of our plants, wildlife, and community. We are committed to expanding our network of protected lands, both public and private, safeguarding vital ecosystems, and linking over 2,500 acres of urban forests, including the Mud Creek Valley, Fort Harrison State Park, and the Fall Creek Greenway. Through this expansion, we aim to foster deeper connections between people and nature, offering accessible recreation and educational opportunities while ensuring the survival of these unique landscapes.



CORE VALUES

COMMITMENT: We love our city and the Mud Creek Valley. We are committed to the continual improvement of our community through the preservation and enhancement our natural areas.

INTEGRITY: As a land trust we strive for organizational excellence in everything we do. We adhere to the standards set forth by the Land Trust Alliance.

COMMUNITY: We are passionate about natural areas and wildlife and ultimately work to preserve both to provide a healthier community for our current and future residents. We willl provide opportunites to connect to nature and with each other.

EDUCATION: We are dedicated to improving our environment through the education of ourselves, our residents and our youth. We hope to foster a renewed appreciation of nature and bring positive change to our community through environmental education and conservation appreciation initiatives.

SUSTAINABILITY: As stated above, we love our city. We love to see it grow and flourish. That being said, we value sustainability most of all. We feel a responsibility to preserve urban natural areas, clean water and wildlife resources for future generations.

PARTNERSHIPS: We are a small but passionate land trust, currently operated entirely by dedicated volunteers. Partnerships are critical to our success. Indianapolis is lucky to have a strong and active conservation community and we aim both to provide and receive support through diverse and effective partnerships.



THE MUD CREEK VALLEY

The Mud Creek Valley is one of Indianapolis' most spectacular but lesser-known natural gems; home to several rare and endangered species, a rich history dating back to the Miami Indians, and a rolling topography rarely found in central Indiana. The Valley also sits atop a large, high quality, aquifer providing drinking water to the greater Indianapolis metropolitan area. The heavily forested, well-connected, natural corridor present in the Mud Creek Valley is arguably the largest remaining, contiguous, natural area in the greater Indianapolis area. This corridor along Mud Creek stretches through northeast Indianapolis (Fall Creek Rd north to 96th Street) and is anchored to the south by Fort Benjamin Harrison State Park where Mud Creek flows into Fall Creek. The watershed in which we work ultimately extends into Hamilton and Madison Counties.

While the habitat and scenery present in the Valley is quite impressive, the future of this important asset is not promised. History has shown that preserving an existing resource is ten-fold easier than recapturing and restoring those areas once lost to urbanization and development. The permanent preservation of this irreplaceable natural resource for the residents and wildlife of Indianapolis is the mission of Mud Creek Conservancy.

Mud Creek Conservancy (MCC), established in 1994, has been dedicated to that mission for over 30 years. The Mud Creek Conservancy (MCC) has permanently protected 96 acres of natural habitat in the Mud Creek watershed. This was accomplished through donations of conservation easements, donations of land and fee title acquisitions of parcels containing ecologically sensitive land with high conservation value. Most of this acreage lies in or abuts the Mud Creek floodplain and serves to proect critical riparian habitat. Concerned citizens living in the area have taken notice of the importance of forever preserving the aesthetic beauty, ecological services, and wildlife habitat provided by the valley and have worked with MCC to achieve that preservation.

From 1995 to 2021, conservation easement donations had been the primary mechanism by which MCC had been able to protect land in the Mud Creek Valley. In April 2021, MCC completed their first ever fee title land acquisition, thanks to a two year long grassroots funded capital campaign securing half a million dollars for the 26-acre Sargent Road Nature Park property. An additional $400,000 was raised to help us open SRNP to the public in June 2024. In 2023, MCC facilitated the outright donation of two different properties, both previously protected by MCC conservation easements. In January 2024, we closed on the future "Blue Heron Nature Preserve", our second land acquisition project in 3 years (and in our 30-year history), permanently protecting nearly 12-acres of forests and wetlands bordering Mud Creek. In May 2024, we facilitated the donation of our second largest preserve at 23-acres, the Peter Jensen Family Nature Preserve. MCC now owns and manages 76 of our 96 protected acres across five different properties.

The natural lands held in trust by the Mud Creek Conservancy for present and future generations will preserve scenic beauty, plant and animal diversity, rare urban natural habitats, clean drinking water and flood protection. The importance of protecting the aquifer lying beneath Mud Creek Valley will increase as Indianapolis continues to expand in population and footprint, stressing existing sources of clean drinking water. Enhancing the water quality of Mud Creek, a tributary of Fall Creek and ultimately the White River, will provide wide ranging benefits to the wildlife and residents of central Indiana. The natural floodplains and wetlands present in the Valley also provide important floodwater retention services, lessening flood impacts to residents downstream.



AWARENESS AND SUPPORT

INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING AND ENHANCING THE MUD CREEK VALLEY, ONE OF INDIANAPOLIS' LARGEST REMAINING NATURAL AREAS, AND INCREASE SUPPORT FOR MUD CREEK CONSERVANCY TO FURTHER THAT MISSION.

ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

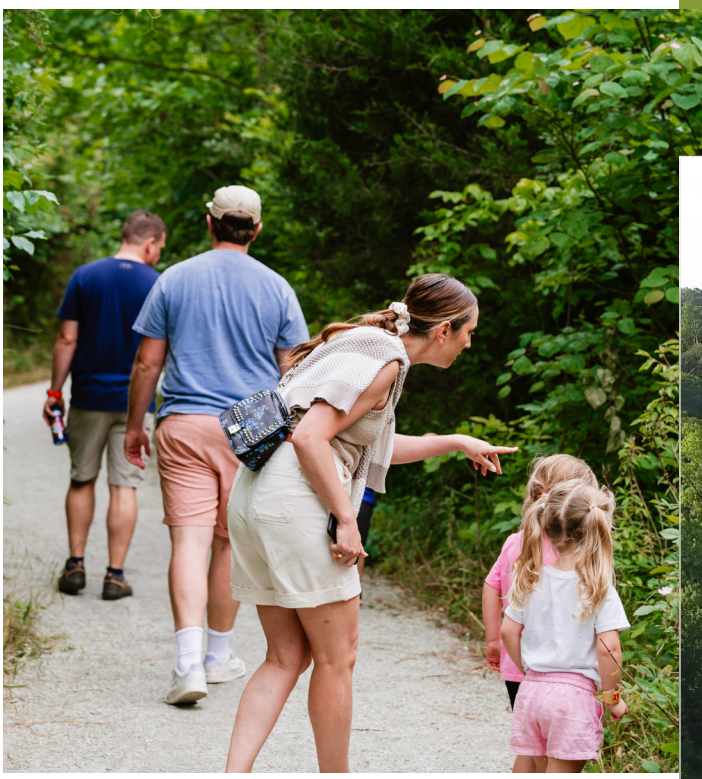
1. INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE UNIQUE AND DECLINING URBAN WILDLIFE HABITAT OF THE MUD CREEK VALLEY AND THE BENEFITS AND ECOLOGICAL SERVICES PROVIDED TO THE GREATER INDIANAPOLIS AREA.

- Organize bi-annual tours of the scenic natural areas of the Valley for conservation leaders, legislators, local politicians and community leaders.
- Conduct bio-inventories at all of MCC's owned properties to highlight the unique habitats, plants and wildlife observed in the Valley
- Craft and tell this compelling story through all communication channels including park signage, member emails, webpage, social media and other media outlets.



2. FOSTER A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND PRIDE AMONG MUD CREEK VALLEY RESIDENTS

- Establish the Mud Creek Valley as the leader of urban natural area preservation and community commitment to conservation in the greater Indianapolis area.
- Increase MCC membership to connect residents and build community
- Host regular workshops and volunteer efforts
- Beautify our roadways with native trees and wildflowers
- Host 3 annual workshops to inspire improved residential habitat management (native plants, invasives, etc.)
- Prioritize management and maintenance of Sargent Road Nature Park and future public properties to ensure these spaces bring joy to visitors and pride to all nearby residents and supporters.



3. CONTINUE INCREASING MCC'S PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE NATURAL AREAS TO ALLOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS, RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO CONNECT WITH NATURAL AREAS IN THE MUD CREEK VALLEY AND FOSTER AN APPRECIATION AND SUPPORT FOR THEIR PROTECTION.

- Complete the necessary fundraising, due diligence, planning and construction to open our second public space, Blue Heron Nature Preserve by January 2027.
- Annually evaluate existing and new properties to determine which sites are best suited to remained closed wildlife sanctuaries and which may be best suited for public usage.

PRESERVATION

PRESERVE AND PERMANENTLY PROTECT THE EXISTING, HIGH QUALITY, MUD CREEK CORRIDOR FROM FALL CREEK ROAD TO 96TH STREET IN INDIANAPOLIS.

ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

1. DEVELOP AND STREAMLINE OUR LAND PROTECTION PROCESSES AND PROTOCOLS.

- Develop Scoring/Evaluation Protocol for Easement/Acquisition Opportunities
- Develop and update Priority Protection Map for unprotected parcels in the Mud Creek Valley project area.
- Ensure Land Trust Alliance standards are met.

3. INCREASE MCC'S PERMANENTLY PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS BY 54 ACRES (FROM 96 TO 150 AC.)

- Engage with top priority parcel owners on voluntary conservation easement/acquisition opportunities.
- Secure MCC's first President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust project.
- Continue assessing opportunities for forest carbon credit projects through entities such as City Forest Credits.
- Work with agencies and municipalities on mitigation land opportunities.

4. GROW MCC'S LAND PROTECTION FUND FROM $50,000 TO $500,000

- Work with existing and new financial supporters to ensure MCC is positioned to proactively preserve high priority lands as opportunities arise.



RESTORATION

RESTORE DEGRADED NATURAL AREAS THROUGHOUT THE MUD CREEK WATERSHED, INCREASE CONNECTIVITY OF THE MUD CREEK CORRIDOR, ENHANCE RESIDENTIAL HABITAT AND IMPROVE WATER QUALITY THROUGHOUT THE WATERSHED.

ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

1. RESTORE DEGRADED SITES IN THE MUD CREEK WATERSHED THAT WILL NET THE LARGEST ECOLOGICAL BENEFITS.

- Develop habitat restoration priorities and habitat restoration map
- Identify potential funding sources and technical assistance programs to assist with restoration work and costs.
- Work with SWCDs, IN DNR, USFWS and mitigation contractors to identify projects in the Mud Creek Watershed.
- Work with property owners to educate on opportunities and importance of habitat restoration
- Serve as liaison with property owners and restoration programs/contractors.
- Ensure long-term protection of any restored sites.

2. ENHANCE THE OVERALL HABITAT QUALITY ON MCC OWNED LAND.

- Train and supervise volunteers to assist with invasive species management at MCC properties.
- Contract and closely manage professional services on management issues that exceed volunteer capacity.
- Utilize financial match and technical assistance programs to accelerate habitat restoration on MCC lands.
- Create an MCC Habitat Stewardship Fund and grow to $50,000 by 2030.
- Increase MCC's capacity to manage land through strategic equipment purchases/rentals/donations.

3. ENHANCE THE OVERALL HABITAT QUALITY AND QUANTITY ON PRIVATE PROPERTY IN THE MUD CREEK WATERSHED.

- Serve as a liaison to connect Mud Creek Watershed residents with available resources for native plant establishment, forest management, invasive species management, etc.
- Offer annual assessments and potential volunteer assistance to MCC conservation easement holders for habitat management.

4. WORK WITH STATE AND CITY OFFICIALS IN ADVANCE OF PLANNED OR POTENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS.

- Ensure all projects retain ecological connectivity through avoiding forest fragmentation and improving stream connectivity.
- Ensure projects consider safe passage for wildlife and pedestrians.
- Encourage the use of native trees and plants in construction restoration or beautification efforts.
- Encourage the use of natural materials when possible.

5. ENHANCE THE OVERALL WATER QUALITY AND AQUATIC HABITAT IN THE NORTHEAST INDIANAPOLIS AREA.

- Facilitate or actively participate in routine Water Quality Testing (IDEM EDF, RAFT, Hoosier River-watch)
- Partner with IDNR and IDEM to conduct biological monitoring of Mud Creek.
- Host a local workshop educating on proper septic system maintenance.
- Host a local workshop educating on streambank stabilization/erosion control and in-stream management.
- Serve as a liaison to landowners and HOA's in the watershed interested in addressing erosion control and other in-stream issues.



OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

CONTINUALLY EDUCATE OURSELVES AND OUR COMMUNITY ON HOW TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH CONSERVATION. UTILIZE OUTREACH TOOLS AND EFFORTS TO REACH RESIDENTS OF THE MUD CREEK VALLEY AND BEYOND, FURTHERING CONSERVATION ETHICS AND PROMPTING ACTION.

ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

1. MAXIMIZE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ON OUR PUBLIC LANDS (SARGENT ROAD NATURE PARK)

- Grow our Nature Art and Education Fund/Investment to $15,000
- Commit to refreshing all educational signage 4 times a year (seasonally) at Sargent Road Nature Park
- Partner with SRA to host monthly educational talks/workshops at Sargent Road Nature House and Sargent Road Nature Park
- Host our first field trip/hike with Mary Castle Elementary at Sargent Road Nature Park by 2026.
- Set up a recurring quarterly "outdoor classroom" type program with a classroom at Mary Castle Elementary by 2030.

2. MAINTAIN MEMBERSHIPS AND ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE INDIANA LAND PROTECTION ALLIANCE AND LAND TRUST ALLIANCE

- MCC President/Executive Director to serve on ILPA Board of Directors when opportunity arises.
- MCC President/Executive Director attends LTA's Rally or Advocacy Day's event annually.
- Encourage all MCC Board Members to attend at least one ILPA training session or event annually.
- Ensure all MCC policies and procedures meet LTA standards for accreditation by 2030.

3. HOST ANNUAL EVENTS FOR MCC MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC

- Host annual MCC Earth Day Festival.
- Host Annual MCC Members Meeting.
- Host a spring, summer, fall and winter birding hike.
- Partner with SRA to host monthly educational speakers/hikes at Sargent Road Nature House.
- Host annual Mud Creek Valley Guardians event for $1,000+ annual supporters.

4. CONTINUALLY DEVELOP AND IMPROVE OUTREACH AND EDUCATION TOOLS AND MATERIALS.

- Add one new educational feature to the MCC platform (ie: blog, podcast, etc.).
- Grow Facebook from 1.5K followers to 3K, Instagram from 985 to 2K
- Distribute bi-monthly email to members/supporters.
- Ensure all FB/Insta videos are uploaded to MCC YouTube channel.
- Distribute at least one physical mailer to past and present supporters.







ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

EXPONENTIAL CONSERVATION SUCCESS OVER THE COURSE OF THE PAST 5 YEARS HAS PROMPTED THE NEED TO RE-EVALUATE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE. MCC WILL GARNER SUPPORT TO BUILD CAPACITY FOR SHORT AND LONG-TERM ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY, GROWTH AND CONSERVATION IMPACT.

ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

1. TRANSITION MCC FROM AN ALL-VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION TO HIRING A PAID STAFF PERSON.

- Update all charters, by-laws, board structure, policies and procedures necessary to facilitate the housing and hiring of a paid Executive Director.
- Fundraise for 2 years (2025/2026-2026/2027) of salary for a permanent part-time Executive Director by October 2025 (~$100,000)
- Annually assess the need to elevate ED position from part-time to full-time.
- Assess the need for additional staff in 2027 (Stewardship Coordinator, etc)
- Host a summer intern supervised by ED in 2026.

2. SECURE THE LONG-TERM HEADQUARTERS AND EDUCATIONAL SPACE FOR MCC BY PARTNERING WITH SARGENT ROAD ASSOCIATION ON THE SARGENT ROAD NATURE HOUSE PROJECT.

- Draft, review and adopt an official Memoradum of Understanding to codify the special partnership between Mud Creek Conservancy, Sargent Road Association and the Sargent Road Nature House.
- As an equal partner in the project, commit to contributing 50% of annual SRNH operationg costs (~$12,000)
- As an equal partner in the project, commit to contributing 49% of the total mortgage cost of the SRNH (~$93,000)

3. BEGIN EXPANDING CONSERVATION IMPACT FURTHER INTO MCC'S MUD CREEK WATERSHED PROJECT AREA.

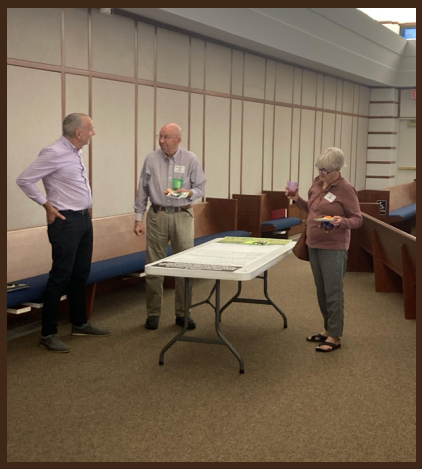
- Intentionally foster new relationships with agencies, organizations and landowners in the Hamilton and Madison Co. portions of the watershed.
- Complete at least one preservation or restoration project in Hamilton County, and one in Madison County by 2030.





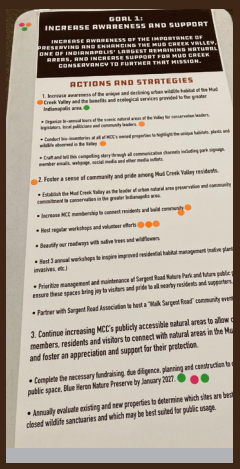
STRATEGIC MEMBER INPUT

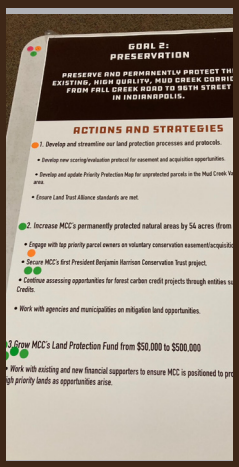


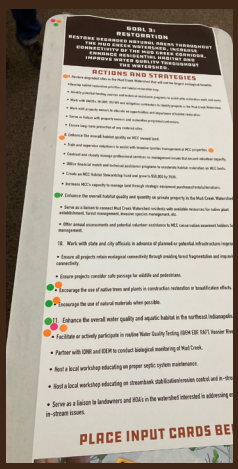


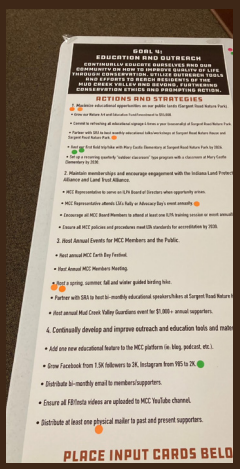


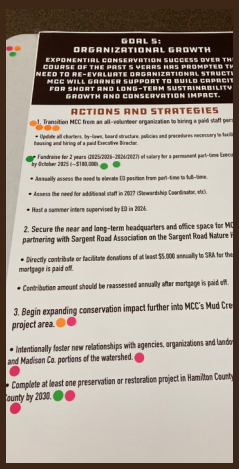
Mud Creek Conservancy Members had an opportunity to review and provide input towards our 2025-2030 MCC Strategic Plan at our Annual Members Meeting on October 29, 2024. Through a facilitated session, Members provided sticker feedback feedback on goals, actions and stragies that were the highest (orange) & lowest priority for them (red), actions they would specifically financially contribute to (green), and an opportunity to submit additional ideas and input (note cards).











SUMMARY

MEMBER TOP PRIORITIES:

- Transition MCC from an all-volunteer organization to hiring a paid staff person.
- Maximize educational opportunities on our public lands.
- Host a spring, summer, fall and winter guided birding hike.
- Enhance the overall water quality and aquatic habitat in the northeast Indy area.
- Increase MCC membership to connect residents and build community.
- Host regular workshops and volunteer efforts.
- Prioritize management and maintenance of Sargent Road Nature Park and future public properties to ensure these spaces bring joy to visitors and pride to all nearby residents and supporters.

MEMBER FINANCIAL INTERESTS:

- Grow MCC's Land Protection Fund from $50,000 to $500,000. (Ensure MCC is positioned to proactively preserve high priority lands as opportunities arise)
- Complete the necessary fundraising, due diligence, planning and construction to open our second public space, Blue Heron Nature Preserve by January 2027.
- Fundraise for 2 years (2025/2026 - 2026/2027) of salary for a permanent part-time Executive Director by October 2025 (~$100,000).
- Secure MCC's first President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust project.
- Host our first field trip/hike with Mary Castle Elementary at Sargent Road Nature Park by 2026.

MEMBER LOWER PRIORITIES:

- Begin expanding conservation impact further into MCC's Mud Creek Watershed project area (Hamilton/Madison Counties).

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

It's been my greatest honor leading this organization over the past 5 years with my dedicated board of directors and family serving alongside me. Our 2020-2025 guided us to many conservation success and I'm excited about the next 5 years laid out in this plan.



Over the past 5 years MCC has:

- Successfully acquired our 1st property (and 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th)
- Opened our first public natural area (Sargent Road Nature Park)
- Nearly tripled our protected acreage (35 to 96 protected acres)
- Cultivated a wonderful community of conservation minded neighbors.

Oh, and my own family grew by 2! Together, we've accomplished some really big things, but we have so much more on the horizon.

Your support will help us:

- Maintain Sargent Road Nature Park as a best-in-class nature preserve for our community.
- Hire our first executive director (we are currently all-volunteer)
- Create our 2nd public space (Blue Heron Nature Preserve)
- Continue to protect more of the 900 acres of at-risk forests remaining in the Mud Creek Valley.

I want to thank you again if you've already joined us in this effort and sincerely hope we have earned your continued support.

Mud Creek Conservancy is a 501c3 non-profit organization and a land trust but we're so much more than that. We're a community and we want you to be a part of it. Please reach out; I'd love to chat with you!

Sincerely,

Ben Miller
President, Mud Creek Conservancy
MCConservancy@gmail.com
317-964-3044



WILL YOU JOIN US?

Know that your ongoing support will enable generations to experience the peace and beauty of our local nature and wildlife.

Preserving our land doesn't have to be hard, but it will take all of us working together. With your help, we can ensure our children, grandchildren, and future generations can experience the wonder of nature right in their backyard.

You can help us protect land through monetary donations, conservation easement donations, or outright land donations.

Monetary donations are a great way for anyone to support Mud Creek Conservancy and the permanent protection of land.

If you own land in the Mud Creek Watershed in Marion, Hamilton, or Madison Counties, we can also work with you to forever protect your land.

Mud Creek Conservancy has 501(c) 3 status, and your donations may be eligible for tax deductions.

We accept donations via check, online donation, stock donation, IRA contributions, donor-advised funds, and more.

Please reach out if you'd be interseted in supporting Mud Creek Conservancy. You can also make donations securely online here:

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?
EMAIL US AT MCCONSERVANCY@GMAIL.COM
OR GIVE US A CALL AT317-964-3044.



CONNECT WITH MCC!

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