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Efroymson Family Fund Awards \$110,000 to Sargent Road Nature Park Project

Mud Creek Conservancy Secures Over \$550,000 for Purchase of Future Nature Park Site

INDIANAPOLIS – The Efroymson Family Fund has helped close an exciting chapter in the Mud Creek Conservancy’s multi-year effort to raise funds to preserve a unique urban natural area and create more access to nature for Indianapolis residents. The \$110,000 grant award pushed the Sargent Road Nature Park fundraising campaign past the \$550,000 goal needed to purchase the 25-acre property, preserving it forever and laying the foundation for the future nature park. The Sargent Road Nature Park project officially launched in September 2019, when the land trust secured a two-year purchase agreement to take the property off the market and raise the funds needed to save the natural area. With 24 months and over a half-million dollars to raise, the group of dedicated volunteers from Mud Creek Conservancy (MCC) and the Sargent Road Association got to work and never looked back.

Fast forward to February 2021: 18 months had passed since the launch of the campaign; 621 grassroots donations had been made by community members to the tune of over \$250,000. Donations ranged from \$5 to \$25,000 with over 60 families committing over \$1,000. An additional \$100,000 had been awarded by the Herbert Simon Family Foundation in August 2020 propelling the campaign past the halfway mark. As the community continued to rally around this effort, the dream of Sargent Road Nature Park was quickly becoming a reality. However, with \$200,000 still to be raised and only 180 days remaining in the purchase agreement, some uncertainty continued to loom. That uncertainty quickly dissipated as two families with a long history of community engagement and volunteerism in the Mud Creek Valley stepped up with a game changing pledge to match up to \$110,000 for the cause. With this generous donation pledge, MCC quickly set up a \$100k matching donation campaign in March, asking the community to rise to the occasion once again, but this time with the prize of preserving this property well within reach. Matching this pledge would secure the necessary funds to move forward with the purchase and preservation of this beautiful habitat and kickstart the Phase 2 fundraising campaign to implement the vision for Sargent Road Nature Park.

Once again supporters were stepping up. Over 50 donors had contributed \$13,500 to the matching campaign in the first two weeks but it was going to be a long climb to reach \$100,000. Then came the incredibly exciting news from the Efroymson Family Fund with the announcement of a \$110,000 grant award to MCC on March 10, 2021 to complete the acquisition of the future Sargent Road Nature Park. This impactful award matched the privately pledged \$110,000 matching donation and closed out the Phase 1 acquisition fundraising campaign 6 months ahead of the deadline. With these recent contributions, MCC is now able to begin the process to close on this property, take ownership and kickstart the Phase 2 fundraising effort to implement the nature park vision.

This project will mark the first land acquisition and eventually the first owned and managed public natural area for the local, volunteer led, land trust operating in the “Mud Creek Valley” of northeast Indianapolis in their 26-year history.

“Historically, our organization has operated on a very limited budget, preserving habitat through donated conservation easements (*legal protections on the habitat with the property remaining in private ownership*). This method of land protection has proven successful in many situations especially given property values in our area that make acquisition extremely challenging and we hope to accept more conservation easements from landowners moving forward. However, easements are not always a viable option for protection, nor do they provide the added benefit of public recreation and education space. This specific parcel contains remarkably diverse habitat that is buffered by existing MCC conservation easements and sits in a critical location in our effort to preserve one of the largest remaining natural corridors in our city. These factors made this parcel an incredibly high priority for preservation, worthy of taking on the monumental task of urban land acquisition” said Mud Creek Conservancy President, Ben Miller.

Mud Creek Conservancy was founded in 1994 and incorporated as a non-profit (501c3) land trust in 1995. It is currently responsible for 35 acres of habitat in permanent conservation easement protection along the Mud Creek Valley and that number of protected acres will soon increase to 60 upon the purchase of the future Sargent Road Nature Park property. The project has a large environmental impact for many reasons. For starters, the Mud Creek Valley contributes to one of Indianapolis’ largest remaining natural habitats, anchored to the south by Fort Benjamin Harrison State Park. This specific 25-acre property is home to a thriving natural ecosystem including:

- A diverse array of habitat types including mature forest, wetlands and open meadows
- Native plant communities acting as a filter to a valuable groundwater aquifer and filtering runoff before it enters Mud Creek, a tributary of Fall Creek and the White River
- Important habitat for wildlife including:
 - Many migratory bird species (over 110 bird species have been documented at this site)
 - Native pollinators like the imperiled Monarch Butterfly
 - Eastern Box Turtles and several salamander species
 - Foxes, Mink, Beaver and Deer

“I’m incredibly grateful for the support of the Efroymson Family Fund, the Herbert Simon Family Foundation, all of our donors and sponsors, and our hardworking volunteers at Mud Creek Conservancy and Sargent Road Association that have made the upcoming purchase and preservation of this property possible. We plan to make Sargent Road Nature Park the most loved and well cared for natural area and community gathering place in our city, connecting Indianapolis residents with nature and providing a haven for the amazing biodiversity of the Mud Creek Valley,” said Miller.

With this property soon under ownership of Mud Creek Conservancy, you can now contribute directly to the creation of the nature park including a 1-mile nature trail, parking area and education displays at SargentRoadNaturePark.com. This property will continue to be closed to the public until Phase 2 fundraising and implementation has been completed but MCC will continue hosting site tours and events highlighting the area’s natural beauty and ecological importance. For more information, follow MCC on Facebook at @MudCreekConservancy or make a donation to be added to their mailing list.